

TOWARD A VITAL CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

A Study for Adults

By

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PHILADELPHIA
THE WESTMINSTER PRESS

1941

Issued as a Part of the Adult Program of Christian Education by the
Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in
the U. S. A. in Connection with the "Learning for Life"
Plan of Guided Adult Study

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Printed in the United States of America

INTRODUCTION

This course is the outcome of long and careful planning. In the summer of 1934, at the Training School held annually in Wooster, Ohio, a group of twenty-five ministers and others interested in the Christian education of adults met for two weeks to consider the planning of materials for an adult curriculum. After study and discussion this group decided that one of the greatest needs of adults is to discover some of the devotional methods and procedures which will contribute most fruitfully to a vital Christian experience.

When this decision had been reached a description of the course was developed and then an outline created. This outline was later cleared through the Adult Age Group Committee and the Curriculum Committee of the Board of Christian Education, and Dr. John A. McAfee was asked to prepare the manuscript. This book therefore represents the thinking of many men and women and the labor of a writer who has devoted himself to his task.

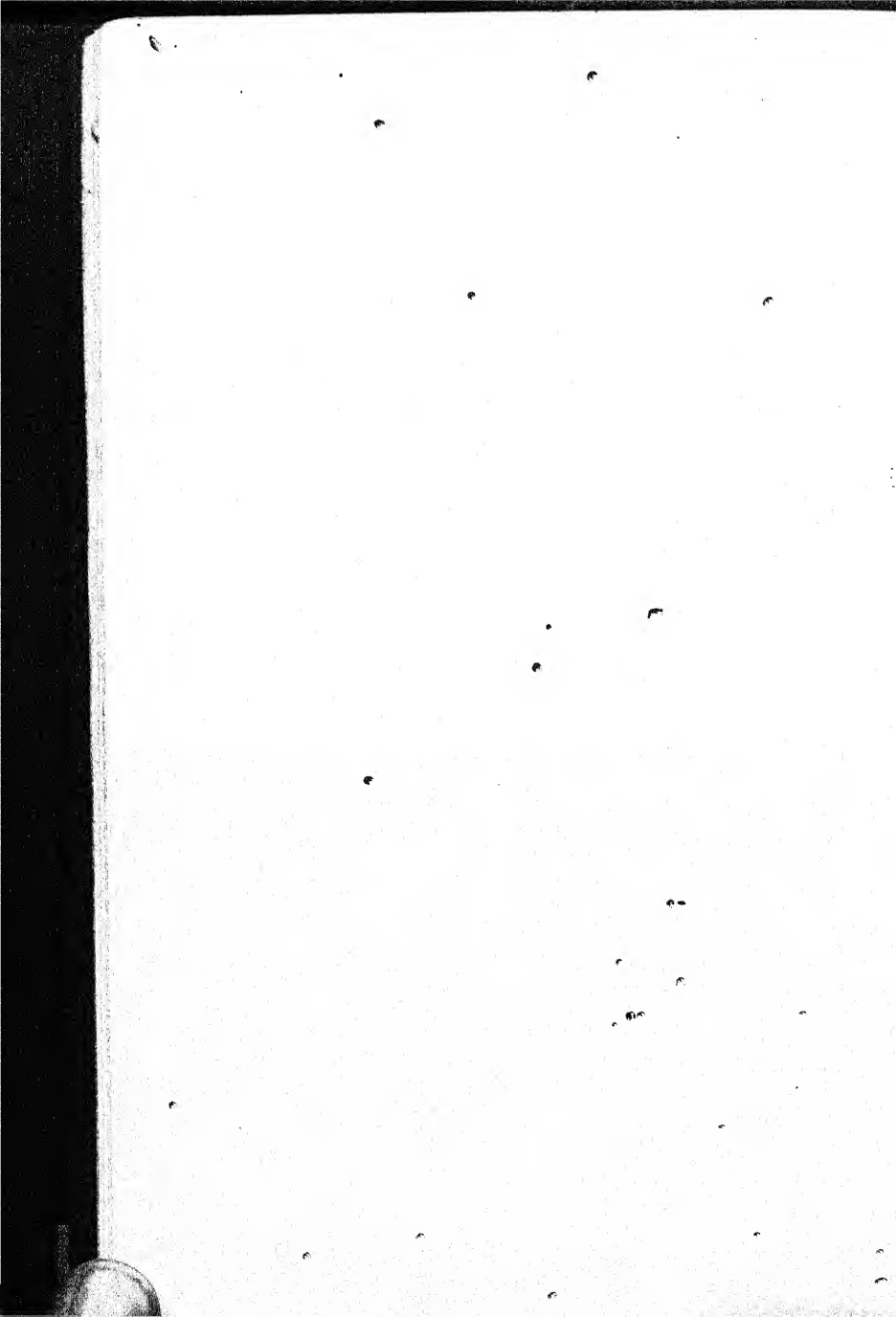
The material in this book has been planned to stimulate the thought of the individual reader and to give background for full and free discussion in adult groups. The experience of the group should not be limited to thinking and talking; it should lead to action. The discussions should be carried on in an atmosphere of worship as the realities of life and our relationship to God are considered.

The subject discussed is so vital that it calls for clear thinking and practical action. By the grace of God in Jesus Christ may the individuals and groups who use this material be led into a vital Christian experience.

THE EDITOR.

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CHAPTER I

THE PRIMACY OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

Scripture References: Ex. 3:1-15; Ps. 46:10; Luke 10:38-42; 11:9-13; John 1:35-42; 4:21-26, 39-42; 15:14-16; Acts 9:1-9; Heb. 11:6.

Personal experience with God in Christ is basic in the Christian life. Until we can say with the men of Samaria that we believe, not because of the testimony of another, but because we have seen and heard for ourselves, we begin at no beginning and work to no end. This experience has been, and is, the taproot of our religion. The purpose of this course is to point out simple and practical steps which will eventuate, for all who persevere, in a vital Christian experience. Before we can intelligently and efficiently set ourselves to the main task, certain preliminary, but fundamental, steps must be taken. The first five chapters are concerned with these steps and are for our fuller participation in the practical ways suggested in the last eight chapters.

SEEKING A DEFINITION

No sooner do we ask ourselves what the Christian experience is than we realize that we cannot adequately define or even describe this which we insist is so important. No man can define God; no man can define the soul; no man can define experience. How, then, can one hope to define the soul's experience with God? It is not only words that fail but ideas as well.

"Whatever your mind comes at
I tell you flat,
God is not that."

Just so it is with that which we call the Christian experience. But this inability satisfactorily to define in no wise affects either the reality or the power of that which we cannot snare in words.

1. **The Inadequacy of Definitions.** The fact is that we cannot fully define any truly great experience. Who can put into words the tremendous reaction of the man who feels for the first time in his own arms the body of a babe that God has intrusted to him and looks down into the baby's eyes—his baby's eyes—and feels the velvety touch of the baby's soft cheek against his own rough one? Who can define the ecstasy of the lover? Yet none would deny the reality or the potency of such experience or hold that inability to define them indicates that they are not real or vital. As Coventry Patmore put it:

"If divinity and love
What's best worth saying can't be said."

2. **Experience as Fellowship.** Let us, in spite of the fact that we know the definition to be inadequate, define the Christian experience as "fellowship with God in Christ." "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him" Heb. 11:6.

To say that God is—especially that he is such a one, as has been revealed by Jesus Christ—is one of the great assumptions of the Christian faith. This we hold against the world. This comes to us not by the adroit argument of men. God is not the conclusion of a syllogism, either in his existence or his characteristics. Here we must believe the testimony of

the soul. We do not hold that a man can "by searching find out God," but, driven inexorably by the inmost promptings of our own hearts, we proclaim our assurance that God is.

Not only is there a God, but he is the "rewarder of them that seek after him." He is not one who has set the worlds and human hearts in operation and bears to them no further relation. He still rules over both. He is not only willing to hear but eager to break through and to enter into relationships of love and tenderness with us. We can, if we will to do so, enter into communion with him. The Christian experience is entering into this fellowship. This not only implies a willingness on his part but it also implies a common ground, a similarity between our spirits and his. We could not enter into satisfactory fellowship with one totally different from ourselves. We are made in his likeness, and so we can, in some small measure, know and love him. This, then, we mean by the Christian experience—fellowship with God in Christ. We cannot know him fully, but we can know him. This is the joy of our faith.

Here is a beautiful, though partial, summary of the Christian's creed, as given by Edward Everett Hale: "I believe that God is here and now and that I am one of his children whom he dearly loves."

3. Varieties of Experience. There are, as William James pointed out a generation ago, varieties of religious experience. One should be slow to deny the reality of the experience of another, just because it does not happen to square with his own. Many elements enter in to cause these variations. There are great temperamental differences within individuals. We are not all cut from the same pattern intellectually, emotionally, or volitionally. There are tremendous differences in our conditioning, in the home, in the church, in surrounding culture. The Quaker and the devout Anglican,

largely because of their early training, seem at first to speak different languages. Upon closer examination it will be found that they are not so far apart.

CONVERSION

There is a constant tendency to limit the Christian experience to that of conversion. Not only so, but the type of conversion experienced by Saul of Tarsus is taken as the norm. If the reality of other experiences is not denied, at least it is discounted. The cataclysmic is held by all too many as the one authentic experience. Thus grave injustice is done to those who have not passed through such an upheaval.

1. **The Fact of Conversion.** Conversion—turning again—has its place in the Christian religion. Perhaps it should have a far more important place than just now we are wont to give it. Something happened to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road. It was a tremendously vital and revolutionary experience through which he passed. It transformed him into Paul. He was never the same man thereafter. The power was not lost with the passing of time but rather became the greater. Others, too, have had experiences just as revolutionary in their outcome. Anyone who has heard the testimony of some of God's saints who have passed through that experience can never doubt either its reality or its efficacy. By their experience these were turned about. They faced toward God and not away from him.

2. **A Cataclysm Not Essential.** When we insist that everyone must pass through some similar event, we do disservice to men and to God. Every pastor knows that many times he finds people, people who quite evidently devoutly love the Lord, who are gravely disturbed because they have never had such an experience as that through which Paul passed. The truth is that many of the most devout souls

who ever lived have never known such a time. We may go even farther and say that many people do not need to pass through some revolutionary experience. Rather have they had a natural growth in Christ from childhood.

We must remember that Saul had been persecuting Christ and the Church. He had been in rebellion, and before he could go toward the Father's outstretched arms he must be brought up sharply and made to face in the opposite direction. This is not at all to deny that we must all be "born anew," to use the striking words of the Master. As a teacher of mine used to put it, we may not be conscious of the time or the circumstances under which we were born again and still be truly born again. We are not at all conscious of the time or circumstances of our physical birth, yet we have rather conclusive evidence that we were born.

It follows that it is not at all necessary that everyone should pass through an experience similar to that through which the great apostle to the Gentiles passed. This is one element of the Christian experience through which some people pass, but it must not be made the standard by which all who claim the right to call themselves Christians are judged.

REACTION OF THE WHOLE BEING

The Christian experience, whether it be in conversion or in any other of its manifestations, is entered into by the whole of a man's being. We have long since learned that we are not justified in dividing a man up. A man's mind does not react in one situation and his emotions in another. His whole being reacts in all situations. This holds in entering into fellowship with the Divine. It is true that in all great experiences the emotions seem to play a large part. Again it is true that persons who are emotionally weak do not seem to enter as fully into the fellowship as do those of highly

sensitive make-up. It is just as true that such practical people do not seem to enter as fully into any great experience, or, for that matter, into life itself. Yet the law of compensation works here, and these less emotional people have a practical contribution to make that the mystic may overlook.

There is no sign over the entrance to Christian fellowship, "Abandon intellect, all ye who enter here!" There is nothing irrational about fellowship with God. Men cannot be reasoned into it; nor can they argue themselves into it. "The demons . . . believe, and shudder." We are bidden to love God, not only with all our hearts and souls, but with our minds as well. No more than we have fellowship with our friends by the intellectual processes alone or by the reaction of our emotions alone, do we enter thus into this priceless fellowship. We must enter with our whole beings.

A DEEPENING FELLOWSHIP

The Christian experience should grow deeper and more meaningful as the years come and go. Far from being one great cataclysmic upheaval, undergone once and for all, it should be an experience which we confidently expect shall be a greater and greater power in our lives. It is not something merely to look back upon but to look forward to as well. It is at its best the nearer it approaches to constancy. We stand now and ever on holy ground. Whether we shall take our shoes from off our feet or merely "sit round . . . and pluck blackberries" is for us to say. Every "common bush" and every daily experience should be "afire with God." We must not forget that the vivid portrayal of God and his purpose came to Moses, not while he was offering sacrifice, nor while he was in any sacred place, but while he was on the dusty road of life's duty. Ex. 3:1-15.

OF THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION

Fellowship with God in Christ is of the very essence of religion. Nothing else can take its place. While many substitutes have been offered, no one of them can feed true religion.

1. **The Foundation of Our Faith.** A faith based on external authority of any kind is an illusion. Soon or late we must come back to inner experience. As Dr. John Kelman says, the proof offered in favor of any other authority must be made valid by going before the tribunal of the authority within. This is what the Westminster fathers meant when they said of the Bible, "yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."¹

2. **"The Tie That Binds."** Here is "the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." Not our creeds, nor our rituals, nor our organizations, but our common experience of having found God in Christ unites us in the Christian fellowship. This came before the writing of the New Testament and before the organization of the Christian Church. Those who knew Jesus in the days of his flesh and those countless others who have known him only as the resurrected Christ are bound together by their common experience.

3. **"The Good Part."** Jesus said of Mary that she had "chosen the good part." She had chosen to be with him, while Martha "was cumbered about much serving." Luke 10:38-42. The sons of Martha have always looked upon the sons of Mary as idle dreamers; and the sons of Mary have considered the sons of Martha as fussy busybodies. Neither group has ever been understood by the other. Most of us

¹ The Confession of Faith, Chapter I, Section V.

to-day are the sons of Martha. We must be forever up and doing. We have never learned to "be still" and know that God is. The original meeting of that familiar verse is, "Let your hands drop, and know that I am God," Ps. 46:10. This is the one thing that we cannot do, nor can we see the sense in doing it. If we fail, however, to keep our fellowship with God, no matter how much good we may seem to do, we are robbing ourselves and God. We need practical mystics—people who avail themselves of many opportunities to commune with God and then go out into the world to render practical service.

The individual Christian and the Christian Church can be vitalized only by attaining and maintaining this Christian fellowship. In ages past it has at times been allowed to grow weak. The Church has come to depend on creed, rite, ritual, form, and organization—and the spirit has well-nigh died out. Such men as the Wesleys have been raised up to call the Church once again to that which is so essential. As this experience has grown strong, fresh lifeblood has flowed into the veins of the individual and the institution. No more important task confronts any one of us than that we assiduously seek to know God, each one for himself. There is no substitute for first-hand knowledge of God. What the world needs is men who, to use the words of Thomas Carlyle, "know God otherwise than by hearsay," or, in the words of Emerson, have "a first-hand acquaintance with Deity." Like George Fox, we need to "know God experimentally."

POSSIBLE FOR ALL

We are not debarred from fellowship by any deficiencies whatsoever. Whosoever will may come. The Christian experience is not for the favored few, but for all. Jesus chose twelve "that they might be with him." What a motley and

varied crew they were! There were in that small number men as dissimilar as John the beloved and Judas the betrayer.

1. The Priesthood of Believers. The fathers had a term to indicate the right and privilege of every child to come to God. They called it "the priesthood of believers." This doctrine is fundamental in Protestant Christianity. By this it is suggested that all, from the least to the greatest, are priests of God, every one with the same right of access to God as every other. The monk in his cell, the theologian in his study, the saint at his task, the minister in his pulpit, has no way open to God which is not equally open to God's humblest child. We must allow no institution or individual, no matter how revered or how saintly, to come between God and us. This throws upon each individual a tremendous responsibility as well as bestows upon him a high privilege. We dare not deliver ourselves over to any Church or any man. All God's people are priests. God speaks to each one and may be known by each one.

2. Understood Only from Within. The words of the devout are as idle tales to others. Outsiders may scoff and sneer. The gospel is "unto Jews a stumblingblock, and unto Gentiles foolishness," I Cor. 1:23. We do not, however, go to the blind to learn of beauty, nor to the tone deaf to learn of music. We should be just as foolish to go to those whose ears are "stopped" and whose eyes are "holden," no matter what proficiency they may have attained in other fields, to learn of religion. Here the testimony of one saint outweighs that of a thousand who for themselves know not God's love.

It is futile to talk of fellowship with God to one who has never shared it. One of our great artists, himself not a follower of the Nazarene, has drawn a meaningful picture of the resurrected Christ breaking bread at Emmaus. In the full light of the picture, with the others, he has painted his

wife and child. On their faces, as they look devoutly toward the Master, there is awe, worship, understanding. In the shadow the painter has drawn his own portrait. On his face there is no light of understanding, no awe or worship—only bewilderment. He could not understand. He could never understand until he came within the light and gave himself to the Crucified One.

“Oh, could I tell, ye surely would believe it!
Oh, could I only say what I have seen!
How should I tell or how can ye receive it,
How, till He bringeth you where I have been!”

3. A Lonely Way. No man can find God for another or enter into an experience with God for another. Though with consummate skill one may describe to you the power of love you can never know that power until you yourself become a lover. The most that parents, teachers, saints, or ministers can hope to do is to give their own testimony and help others along the way. They can, by their witness and advice, render an inestimable service, but in the final analysis each must find God for himself or his spiritual life will lack reality and vitality. Andrew did for Simon all that any man can do for another when he persuaded him to go to see Jesus for himself. John 1:35-42.

The way to God is at times a very solitary way. No two men travel exactly the same road or at the same pace. John Bunyan has been severely criticized because he had his pilgrim set out alone, leaving behind even his own wife and children. This was not because John Bunyan, himself a family man, did not love and cherish his family. It was rather because of his truer insight that, to a very large degree, each man must travel his own road alone. He cannot take with him even those who are nearest and dearest to him. They may find

their way into fellowship similar to that which he attains, but each must find his own way. However, as men climbing on different paths toward a mountain top find themselves constantly drawing nearer to each other as they approach the summit, so do we draw nearer to each other as we all draw closer to God.

4. **Ways to God.** While what we have just been saying is true, and while it is true that any road which brings a man home is a good road, yet the wisdom of the ages has found that some ways are helpful and some are harmful in the soul's quest for God. It is our ultimate aim in this study to explore some of those ways which have helped other men into fellowship with God in Christ. Our end is not academic but practical, that together we may travel these ways and thus press on toward a more vital Christian experience.

QUESTIONS

1. In spiritual matters how important are definitions?
2. Give your own definition of "the Christian experience."
3. Phillips Brooks is reported to have said that the worst thing you can do for another man is to tell him your own religious experience. What danger did he see in this? What would you say for the other side?
4. How may we cultivate greater respect for those whose experience differs from ours?
5. Do we expect conversions of the Pauline type to-day? Should we?
6. What effect do the years have on our Christian experience?
7. What substitutes are offered for personal religious experience?
8. What was the conditions of the Church at the time of the Wesleys? Are there any similar conditions to-day? Are

there any indications of a revival of vital religion? What turn should such a revival take?

9. What did George Fox mean when he said that he knew God "experimentally"?

10. How far can we and should we try to direct the religious life of others?

11. Religion has been defined as "the flight of the alone to the Alone." Is such a definition justified?

12. How may we best profit in our religious life by the experience of others?

CHAPTER II

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

Scripture References: Isa. 26:3; 40:28-31; Matt. 7:15-20; Mark 1:13-17; 4:36-41; Luke 8:26-40; 9:28-36; 10:25-37; John 10:7-18; Acts 10:1-18; II Cor. 5:17-20; Gal. 5:22.

How shall a person know when his is an authentic Christian experience? What are the marks of the true fellowship with God in Christ? The one who has this fellowship needs no other evidence that his is the true experience, yet at times much that is quite evidently spurious passes as the Christian experience and much that is truly Christian is never so classified.

RELIGIOUS AND OTHER GREAT EXPERIENCE

We are sometimes sorely distressed because we cannot determine whether a given experience is religious or not. We seem unable to separate the sacred and the secular. As a man stands on some majestic height in the Rockies and looks down upon the peaks marching in serried ranks toward him, his soul is stirred within him. Is this sacred or secular? As he listens to the crashing crescendos of glorious music, his whole being is aroused. Is this emotion sacred or secular? As he looks into the eyes of the one he loves, all life takes on deeper significance. Is this sacred or secular? Who can say? Why need we draw a hard and fast line? We are unable to do it, and it would not serve any good purpose if we could. A man is not sacred at one time and secular at another. Every experience, no matter how we may label it, is of the

whole man. We should, with great joy, recognize the fact that there is much in common between religious and all other great experience. We should, indeed, never rest content until every experience is truly religious. Our brethren of the Society of Friends are quite right in insisting that nothing is common or unclean, Acts 10:1-18. We are not justified in marking off that which is sacred from that which is not. Life and all life's experiences constitute a sacrament.

CHRISTIAN AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

We are rightly jealous for our Christian faith. We believe that only in Christ Jesus dwelt "the fulness of the Godhead" and that no man comes to the Father but by him. What, then, is the relationship between religious experience and Christian experience? In the Prologue to The Gospel According to John the author did not hesitate to identify Christ with the Logos of Greek philosophy. Manifest in time, yet he "was in the beginning with God." John 1:1-14. God has never left himself without witness in the world. He has ever been seeking men, even as he seeks them to-day. While we believe that the Master does fully express God to us, yet we know that the little system we have built up around him is not perfect.

"Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And thou, O Lord, art more than they."

Through the ages men have been seeking to know God. The prophets and the saints have sought him and have found him. We believe that the Christian experience of finding God in Christ is the highest, yet it does not detract from the honor or the dignity or the worth of this Christian experi-

ence to realize that it has much in common with all great religious experience. No more than we can separate the sacred and the secular can we by any rigid line separate the Christian from other great religious experience.

GOD IN CHRIST

The Christian's conviction is expressed in the words of Paul that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," II Cor. 5:19. We, as Christians, come to fellowship with God through his outreach to us in Jesus Christ. In the Curriculum Guide of The International Council of Religious Education religious experience is defined as "specifically Christian when it is conceived of as having been made possible and real through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and through the experience of Christ as a present, mediating channel for this fellowship."

KNOWN BY ITS FRUITS

Jesus said of the false prophets that they must be judged by their fruits. If we would know the reality of our experience we must so judge it. This is the test which appeals to our generation and it is one from which we should not shrink. "Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them." Matt. 7:20. Let us enumerate seven of the fruits of fellowship with God in Christ.

1. Purity. No man can be in fellowship with God and remain unclean. At times God has been likened to a fire that purifies by burning out the dross. In his presence impure motives cannot long live. So often we fail to enter into his presence because we steadfastly cling to our own impurity! In the story of the Gerasene swine it is written: "And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes round about asked him to depart from them," Luke 8:37. Here Jesus was an

unwelcome guest. They wanted no more of him. He had healed the man possessed of the devils. The others had seen this miracle, but they also saw that there was some strange force which might make them quite uncomfortable, and they would have none of him.

We are wont to think of the Christian experience as that which brings peace and comfort, and so it does—but not always immediately. Not long ago I heard a Sunday School officer speak on "Christian Education and Business Ethics." His one point was that Christianity should bring peace and quiet of heart. This is exactly what, in many instances, Christianity should not give. The true Christian fellowship will not always bring peace and quiet. Certainly it will not bring these first. Rather it will bring purity, and this sometimes at great struggle and cost and discomfort to us.

The story is told of a wise adult who went to the room of a student to find the walls lined with lewd and vulgar pictures. He said nothing in reproof, but a few days later he sent his young friend a beautiful picture of the Christ. He knew that the young man could not place that picture on the walls beside the others. A subsequent visit revealed to him that the ignoble pictures were gone and that the worthy picture had taken their place. Impurity cannot live in the presence of Christ.

2. **Strength.** True strength has ever been found, not in man, but in God. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait for Jehovah shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." Isa. 40:30, 31. We all know what it is to receive strength from a friend. Into his presence we come, all undone, our strength gone; out from him we go with our strength renewed. To what a supreme degree this

holds for those who wait on the Lord! As J. Brierley has it: "Spiritual power is simply the capacity to receive. Limitless force lies at each soul's threshold, waiting to make it mighty. Religious genius is simply a superior power of appropriation."¹

The strength which comes from Christian fellowship may not be the strength which the world acknowledges. It may not be the power to attain place and position. The chances are it will be none of these things. It will be an inner strength of soul, a capacity to take any experience that comes and use it as the raw material with which to build a better life. Great lives have not been lived in their own strength. Noble souls have been conscious that in and through them the eternal was entering into the temporal. To them "the everlasting reality of religion" was in companionship with the infinite Father of us all. Thus it is that men attain a power greater than their own. If we find ourselves weak and faltering before the worst that the world can do unto us, we may well question whether we are truly knowing God.

3. Serenity. Serenity of soul is a great Christian virtue. It is a fruit of fellowship with God. How few of us have it to-day! We are anxious, distressed, disturbed, faithless. We may even count it as a virtue that we are putting forth our hands to steady the ark of God. How inspiring is the man who takes life's winds full in the face, who asks no quarter, and whose soul is always serene! Truly such a one serves his day and generation! The disciples in the storm with the Master could not understand him. He quietly slept while the wind was raging. Mark 4:36-41. They did not know his serenity because they were not in constant fellowship with the heavenly Father as he was. In this fellowship lies the secret of serenity.

¹ "Studies of the Soul," page 15, Thomas Whittaker. 1903.

One great soul upon whom the World War focused a strong light was Cardinal Mercier. At the time of the great jubilee in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of his consecration as a priest, he thus spoke to the people he loved: "Whether in the years of peace, or in the years of war, whether in poverty or prosperity, whether in failure or in success, never have I ceased to feel, deep down in my heart, a sense of tranquillity, confidence, and peace. And as I want you all to be happy, I must tell you the secret of Christian serenity. It lies in giving yourself confidently to the goodness of the Lord."² It is an open secret, and yet so many of us fail to find it! There is no discomfiting or discouraging such a man. He could testify with the prince of the prophets, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee," Isa. 26:3.

4. **Enrichment.** In fellowship with God there will be development and enrichment of our lives. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly," John 10:10. There have been many pseudoreligious experiences which have impoverished life. Such is never the genuine Christian experience. Many people have what amounts to a fear of God. They are afraid that in some way he will rob them of much that makes life sweet and worth while. This comes no doubt from too great stress on the negative aspects of religion. Too often Christianity is caricatured into a system of wholesale prohibitions. The ascetic tendency, usually present in deeply religious people, is allowed to run riot. We forget that God never takes anything from us except to replace it with something better. He never forbids us to do anything except that thereby we shall be free to do that which is finer. We do well to take to heart these words of the

² "The Life of Cardinal Mercier," by John A. Gade, page 254. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934.

great American psychologist, William James: "In opening ourselves to God's influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled."

Here, as elsewhere, we must ever keep before us the fact that we are thinking of fellowship, of first-hand acquaintance, with God. He will always develop and bring out the best that is within us. When our religion degenerates and becomes secondhand, it loses its power to give us the abundant life. If, as Professor Van Dusen suggests, "the on-coming generation views religion from the outside, the former generation knew religion from within,"³ we have found a point of tragic weakness. Our lives will become what they should be only by that enrichment which comes from God himself.

5. Ethical Sensitiveness. This has not always been apparent as the result of religious experience. Rather than making us sensitive, religion has seemed to dull us to life round about. Whether we like it or not, there is enough truth to hurt in the charge that Christianity has at times been an opiate. As practiced, it has been a drug to the poor and to the rich as well. Too many of those who have boasted a deep experience have withdrawn from the world, that in quiet and solitude they might enjoy uninterrupted communion. Times of quietude are justifiable and far more essential than our day is wont to consider. They are not, however, sufficient in themselves, but are sources of strength against periods of activity. When on the Mount of Transfiguration Peter suggested that they build there three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, he gave expression to a very natural tendency. Luke 9:33. He would stay there, far removed from the noise of the crowd, and there enjoy fellowship with Christ and the saints. Yet Jesus did not stay on the mount but came down once again to

³ "The Plain Man Seeks for God," by Henry P. Van Dusen, page 16. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.

go on his mission of mercy, healing the bodies and the spirits of men.

This aspect of the Christian fellowship should be stressed. We may well doubt the authenticity of any experience which does not make us more sensitive, not only to that which may seem wrong or right to us, but also to the practical needs of men in this world. True fellowship will send us forth with our loins girt, never to rest until "the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever." Paul gave "the fruit of the Spirit" as "love, joy, peace." But he did not stop there. These are inestimable qualities in human life, but the Spirit must bear other fruit as well, fruit which blossoms in our attitude toward others. So Paul goes on in his list: "Long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control," Gal. 5:22.

When the lawyer tried to entrap the Master by beguiling him into an academic argument as to who constitutes one's neighbor, you will recall that Jesus replied with one of his inimitable stories, that of the Samaritan whom by common consent we call "The Good Samaritan." Luke 10:25-37. Love to God and love to man went together in the old law, and so they did in the mind of the Master. In lowly love to those round about, regardless of creed, race, or nation—all these were involved in the story of Jesus—was the sure indication of one's right to inherit eternal life. Dr. A. Herbert Gray does not put it too strongly when he says: "There is only one infallible proof as to whether people have really found God or entered into his fellowship, and it is infallible. Do they or do they not love their fellow men? They cannot be in living touch with God and fail so to love, whatever mystic experiences they may claim to have."⁴

⁴ "Finding God," page 74. Harper & Brothers, 1931. Used by permission.

6. **Clarified Vision.** Fellowship with God in Christ will bear fruit in a clearer vision of God's purposes for us and for the world. "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God." Mark 1:14. What that gospel means in its entirety we do not yet know. We can be sure that Jesus had a vision of the world, of men and women of every clime and condition, brought into loving relation with the One whom he taught us to call "Father." We pray that the Kingdom may come, that his will may be done on earth, even as it is in heaven. So we pray and then all too soon we forget. The Kingdom tarries long and we grow impatient. Our impatience leads to despair and our despair to loss of faith. This faith can be restored and kept strong only by the fellowship of our spirits with the infinite Spirit, whose we are and whom we would serve. This fellowship will help us to a clearer vision of the task that is ours.

7. **Christlike Character.** It is perhaps in the nature of a summary to say that the fruit of fellowship will be Christlike character. Jesus is our great Example and it must be our constant endeavor to become like him. We must press on "till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," Eph. 4:13.

Many more will be the fruits of the Christian experience, but these must follow any genuine experience and so constitute a test of Christian fellowship with God in Christ, purity, strength, serenity, enrichment, ethical sensitiveness, clarified vision, Christlike character. Perhaps we may say that such things are too high for us. We have not fully attained to any one of them. Of course we have not, because surely no one of us claims that his fellowship with God is complete and perfect. At least we may insist that our fel-

lowship must make us love these things and aspire to reach them.

THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS

One should constantly verify his own experience by comparing it with the experiences of others. It is so easy to misinterpret and misconstrue. Each one must be the final judge of what is for him the way to go, yet he is foolish indeed who does not profit by what other men have learned about God and about life. Here is one of the values of that great storehouse of experience which we call the Bible. There we can see portrayed the record of individuals and nations. We are all prone to vagaries and at no point more than in matters of religion. Things both foolish and wicked have been done by men who were thought conscientious. The wise man will not trust his own interpretation alone, but rather he will profit by accumulated experiences wherever they may be found.

THE RESULT OF DISCIPLESHIP

The deepest and most satisfying Christian fellowship with God comes as the result of long years of discipleship. We are not wise to make this experience the test of discipleship. Dr. Raymond Calkins says: "The Christian experience is the result and the reward of Christian discipleship. It ought never to be made the condition of it. By discipleship is meant just what Jesus meant by it, a willingness to take up one's cross and follow him. But, as the whole record alike of New Testament history and of Christian biography shows, to follow him is inevitably to be led into fellowship with God."⁵

Although the examination of candidates for church membership is in most cases very superficial indeed, yet we do

⁵ "The Eloquence of Christian Experience," page 85. The Macmillan Company, 1927. Used by permission.

expect the one entering into the Christian life to have some experience. We should not, however, expect that the testimony of a child and that of a saint will be the same. Nor should we be disappointed that our own experiences as followers are not always the same. Rather we should expect that as we follow the Master through the days, we shall ever enter into more complete, satisfying, and fruitful communion with God.

The religious experience, then, is distinctly Christian when God is revealed and realized through Jesus Christ. The genuineness of the experience is attested by its effect on our lives. The quality of our lives will be changed, not only in our ability to glorify God and to enjoy him, but in our eagerness, in love and tenderness and understanding, to serve his children, our brothers and sisters.

QUESTIONS

1. In your judgment can we draw a line between the sacred and the secular?
2. What are the dangers in insisting that all things are sacred?
3. Did the saints of the Old Testament have as satisfying a religious experience as is possible for us?
4. How far should we acknowledge a common ground between Christianity and other great religions?
5. Are some people truly Christian at heart who have never openly avowed their discipleship? Would it be possible for a person to have a genuine Christian experience and not recognize it as such?
6. How would you differentiate the Christian experience from religious experience?
7. Are we inclined to crave too much the peace and comfort which religion brings?

8. Is the Christian experience always pleasurable?

9. A great American teacher used to tell his students that religion has the same function in life that a band has in the army: it should inspire but should never try to lead. What would you say to this?

10. Make your own list of the fruits of Christian fellowship with God.

11. In what ways can we test our own experience by that of others?

12. Can there be true Christian experience without ethical import?

CHAPTER III

JESUS CHRIST AND THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

Scripture References: Matt. 1:18-25; 7:24-29; 28:16-20; Luke 15:11-24; John 6:66-71; 14:1-14; 20:24-29; II Tim. 1:8-13; Heb. 4:14-16; I John 4:7-12; Rev. 3:20.

More explicitly than we did in the previous chapter let us consider the place of Jesus Christ in the Christian experience. We who are heirs of the Christian tradition are steeped in those conceptions of God which came when "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." Our every thought about God is colored by the revelation of his love in Jesus Christ.

"NOT WHAT, BUT WHOM"

Our faith is based, not on words or records, important as these are, but upon a Person. Christianity is a religion of divine sonship and human brotherhood revealed and realized through Jesus Christ. Paul built on the firm foundation when he wrote, "I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day," II Tim. 1:12. This same apostle "determined not to know anything . . . save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The Twelve were many times bewildered by Jesus. They could not understand him; yet they could not stop short of the heartfelt testimony of Thomas, "My Lord and my God," John 20:28. When the opposition to Jesus began to grow, the record is that "upon

this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." Jesus asked the Twelve if they, too, would desert him. Simon Peter gave answer for them and for all who since have called Jesus Lord, "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life," John 6:68.

1. **His Rightful Place.** Jesus must be given the central place in all our thinking, acting, and experiencing. When anything is allowed to crowd him out of the position which is rightfully his, the life of the institution and the life of the individual suffer. Historically it is true that when the Church has denied him his place, when rite or ceremony or the Church itself has usurped the position which is his, the Church has grown impotent and religion has been at a low ebb. Dr. T. R. Glover admonishes us that "one of the weaknesses of the Church to-day is—put bluntly—that Christians are not making enough of Jesus Christ."¹ Who will deny that he is right? We cannot enter into the fullness of the Christian fellowship with God unless we make much of Jesus Christ.

2. **Greater than His Interpreters.** We should keep it ever in our minds that, as Matthew Arnold put it, "Jesus is always greater than his interpreters." After these two thousand years men are ever finding new and fresh meaning in him and in his message. Books about him continue to flow from the press. Whenever a man has a fresh word to say about that matchless character, men crowd around to hear. From seemingly every angle students have approached him, always to be baffled when they have tried to explain him. Surely he proves too great for our little minds and our little hearts as well! We must consider no interpretation, not even our own, as final or adequate. Very humbly and very modestly should we ever try to say what he means to us.

¹ "The Jesus of History," page 4. Harper & Brothers, 1917.

Sabatier has spoken thus not only for himself but for countless others: "I may disdain the inner life of the soul, and divert myself from it by the distractions of science, art, and social life; but if, wearied by the world of pleasure or of toil, I wish to find my soul again, and live a deeper life, I can accept no other guide and master than Jesus Christ."²

THE JESUS OF HISTORY

On a certain day in the history of the world Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. As a historical figure he is well attested. Though brilliant attempts have been made to prove that he never lived, even the most destructive writers have well-nigh abandoned such endeavors. We have but meager records of his life and work and yet enough to give us a very satisfying picture of him. That historical figure should be our constant study. We should try to enter into sympathetic understanding of him and of his purposes. We should in imagination go with him as he walked the dusty roads of Galilee. We should follow him in the days of his flesh as far as the records carry us, that thus we may catch his spirit and enter into his purposes. Merely as a character of history no other person has exerted such a profound influence on all succeeding generations. Judged by any standard you will, he stands unique in the annals of men. Pagan and Christian alike testify to his influence on the history of the world. Unlike that of other figures of history his influence grows greater as the years and centuries succeed each other.

It is said that an alumnus of the college of which Robert E. Lee was at one time president, a man now in middle life and an eminent lawyer, tries to return to his *Alma Mater* at least once a year that, as he says, again for a little while he may put himself under the influence of that great soldier

² "Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion," by Auguste Sabatier, page 117. George H. Doran Company.

and Christian gentleman. Great characters of history do exert a profound influence far beyond the years of their earthly activities. Many to-day think that they are not influenced by Jesus of Nazareth, but he has changed the whole atmosphere of the world in which we live.

THE ABIDING PRESENCE

It is not Jesus as a historical figure whom we worship, but Jesus as an abiding presence in life. There is "the Jesus of history" and there is "Jesus in the experience of men." Important as was that great character, and great as was the work he did while in bodily presence on the earth, his true significance for us lies in the fact that he may be known by us and loved of us, that in him we find God. To the bewildered group gathered around him at the time of his ascension Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," Matt. 28:20. It is through this living presence that we come to know God.

Here, as in all religion, only the heart of the individual can prove the reality. Yet here, as elsewhere, the testimony of others has its due weight. We might call numberless witnesses. For instance, here is C. F. Andrews, our contemporary who has done such yeoman service for India, saying: "Christ has not been for me simply a great and noble ideal, embodied in an ancient Scripture. He has been to me a living Person, with whom I have held close communion. His voice, when I heard it, had all the authority of his own Passion behind it."³ Or, again, there are the words of that masterful preacher, Maltbie D. Babcock:

"I envy not the Twelve,
Nearer to me is He:
The life he once lived here on earth
He lives again in me."

³ "What I Owe to Christ," page 352. The Abingdon Press, 1933.

Jesus Christ, the abiding Presence, he who promised to be with us always, still speaks to-day to the hearts of all who will hear.

THE REVELATION OF GOD

For us "the glory of God" has shown "in the face of Jesus Christ." It was because "God so loved the world" that our Lord was sent into the world. In him is God revealed to us.

1. A Seeking God. It has been pointed out that while other religions picture man as seeking God, only the Christian religion pictures God as seeking man. One of the finest pictures of God given anywhere is in that story of the Master's, "The Prodigal Son," Luke 15:11-24. And in that story there is no finer detail than that given in the twentieth verse: "But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." To think of God standing with arms outstretched toward us, seeing us while we are yet a great way off, reaching out in love toward us, no matter how we may have denied him or what fools we may have made of ourselves in the far country—this is one of the most comforting and inspiring conceptions that can come to a man. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." I John 4:10.

2. The Father. From our youth up we have been taught to call God "Father." In this one word is summed up what we need to know about God. If my child could be taught but one tenet of the Christian faith, without question I should have him taught to look up into the face of the Eternal and call him "Father." We are often told that Jesus was not the first so to speak of God. Doubtless that is true, but he was

the first to put it in the central place in men's thought of God.

The implications of this conception are beyond our reckoning. Surely it is for us a thing more dire to outrage the love of a Father than to disobey the mandates of any monarch. Sin becomes more heinous and not less so. This world is not, as Thomas Hardy suggests, a "nonchalant universe"—not if at the heart of it there is a love best described as that of a Father. In God's sight every one of us is of inestimable value, even as to an earthly father each one of his children is of value so great that it cannot be measured. So we might go on.

3. **A Christlike God.** It is not particularly significant or helpful to us that we should find Jesus in accord with what we conceive God to be like. It is of tremendous significance and of inestimable helpfulness to us that we learn to think of God as like Jesus Christ. This may seem to be a startling statement, but let us think it through. Note John 14:9. Very few of us, even after all these centuries of Christian thought, always so think of him.

In the introduction to his book "The Christlike God," Bishop McConnell says: "I am not seeking to prove the existence of God, or the primacy of the ethical attributes in the character of God. Assuming such Christlikeness, I am simply trying to see whither it will lead us in our thought of God."⁴ It would be for all of us a most wholesome exercise to make a similar endeavor. Blessed shall we be when we learn to think of God as like Jesus Christ, and not, as we do so persistently, think of Jesus as like our own idea of what God must be like.

4. **"Glad About God."** In his spiritual autobiography Lyman Abbott tells of his troubles and perplexities as a young

⁴ "The Christlike God," by Francis John McConnell. The Abingdon Press, 1927.

man. As a youth he feared God, and was greatly disturbed by interpretations of the heavenly Father as he heard them given in the pulpit. His Christianity was a burden rather than a joy. While still distressed, he came under the influence of that wonderful preacher and wise counselor, Henry Ward Beecher. In the words of one of the reviewers of Abbott's book, the pastor of the Plymouth church made the lad "glad about God." We have not yet discovered the message of Christ to our hearts until he has made us rejoice that we can serve God, jubilant that we can come into his presence.

THE IDEAL

For us Jesus is not only the revelation of God but the revelation of the perfect man. He is for us the example and the ideal. In him we find God; and in him we find the "highest, holiest manhood." In the midst of our insistence upon his being the divine Son of God, we must not lose sight of his humanity. It has ever been a perpetual problem to keep these two aspects in proper balance.

When we grow satisfied with ourselves and feel that after all our lives are not so bad, we should compare ourselves, not with those around us, but with the Man of Nazareth. Then, and then only, shall we see how far short we have fallen. Nor must we despair. We must remember that "we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," Heb. 4:15. Not only does he manifest to us in his life the highest manhood, but by his abiding presence he gives to us the power to push on toward that goal.

THE AUTHORITY

After that discourse which we call "The Sermon on the Mount," "the multitudes were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes," Matt. 7:28, 29. To-day we scorn all authority. We will have none of it. Every man is a law unto himself, especially in matters of the spirit. Of all those who try to speak to us we ignore none so completely as those who try to speak to us out of the past. Yet to-day, as when he spoke to the multitudes, Jesus speaks with authority. *He is the Authority.* He is the Master of the centuries, who will not be denied, and the Master of the human heart.

His authority over us lies not in the promulgation of rules and regulations. He handed us down no guidebook or set of instructions; he enunciated only a few general principles. The old question, "What would Jesus do?" is still a good question for us to ask ourselves, but we need not expect to find a ready-made solution for the problems we must face. Jesus dealt with specific cases, and we may, from a prayerful consideration of these cases, deduce certain general rules, but he has given to us no rule of thumb.

The authority of Jesus is within our own lives. As Dr. Coffin has it: "Jesus is not a giver of laws, but a maker of consciences. . . . His main concern is not to supply new beliefs or new rules, but to produce new men."⁵ He is a teacher, an example, but infinitely more. He is a transforming, vitalizing presence, making new men, enabling them to look out with new eyes, and to work with the clear vision of eternity before them.

⁵ "What Men Are Asking," by Henry Sloane Coffin, page 113. Cokesbury Press, 1933.

"He wakes desires you never may forget;
He shows you stars you never saw before;
He makes you share with him forevermore
The burden of the world's divine regret."

THE SAVIOUR

Before the birth of Christ the angel said to Joseph, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins," Matt. 1:21. The name "Jesus" means "Saviour." As to just *how* Jesus is the Saviour good men's opinions, from the very first, have differed, but *that* he is the Saviour the Christian conscience and conviction have agreed. No theory to explain the fact is satisfactory, yet the fact remains. One dare not leave out this fact, no matter how briefly one touches on the place of Jesus Christ in the Christian experience. •

THE WAY

For us the way to fellowship with God is through his self-revelation in Jesus Christ. It may be that

"God has other words for other worlds,
But for this world the Word of God is Christ."

Just before the close of his life, as Jesus met with the little band in the upper room and sought to make them understand and to comfort them, he said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me." Philip, with apparently some little show of petulance, demanded of the Lord, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." In gentle rebuke Jesus said unto him, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father," John 14:1-14.

When we can get down beneath all the theories and doctrines of the Person of Christ to fellowship with him, we find

ourselves in true communion with the Infinite. To those who have found God in Christ it is the plain and simple way. As Dr. A. Herbert Gray says, "Every look at Christ makes God real to them."⁶

Jesus Christ does more than teach us about God and about ourselves: he leads us into the presence of God. He makes us acquainted with God. He is the way into fine and satisfying communion with the heavenly Father. At the door of each heart he stands and knocks; he forces himself upon no man. The inner court of every man's being he holds inviolable. Yet to those who will open the door to him he will come in, and transform their lives by the power of his presence. Rev. 3:20.

Our constant purpose should be to study Jesus, not only as he is portrayed in the pages of Holy Writ, but as he is portrayed in the lives of others and in our own experience. "The portrait of Christ itself, just as we have it in the Synoptics, was not constructed out of early documents. It was the marvelous creation of a redemptive experience of his Person. The Evangelists did not search the records of the earliest accounts of his Person; they wrote out that record which he himself had inscribed within. The portrait of Christ, that is, is itself the product of an experience, and there is no true understanding of his real Person short of an experience of his Person."⁷ The conviction of the Christian heart is well expressed in the words of Mrs. Meynell:

"Thou art the Way.
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,
I cannot say
If thou hadst ever met my soul."

⁶ "Finding God," page 82. Harper & Brothers, 1931. Used by permission.

⁷ "The Eloquence of Christian Experience," by Raymond Calkins, page 105. The Macmillan Company, 1927. Used by permission.

One day the little daughter of a minister had the coveted privilege of staying in his study while he worked. The man was busily engaged and the little girl of three was bending over her book just like her father. For some time there was silence. Then the voice of the child came: "Daddy!" The man replied, "What is it, dear?" The child said, "Are you steddyyin'?" The father replied that he was studying and the girl said that she was studying too. Again there was silence, and again there came the childish voice: "Daddy, are you steddyyin' Jesus? And the man thought, "'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.'" He knew that whatever else he did or did not do, he should be studying Jesus, the Jesus of history and the Jesus of experience, who only is "the way, and the truth, and the life."

QUESTIONS

1. In what different ways do men think of Jesus to-day? How do they evaluate him and his place in life and religion?
2. Was Dr. Glover justified in his criticism that we are "not making enough of Jesus Christ"? How can we remedy this?
3. Trace the influence of Jesus as a historical character.
4. Do we come to Jesus first as a historical character or as an abiding presence?
5. How does the Christian revelation of God differ from that given in other religions?
6. What other religions, if any, think of God as "Father"?
7. If we think of God as like Christ, what shall we say of him?
8. Would you agree with Dr. John Kelman in this statement: "Our first duty is not to do good; it is not even to be good; it is to be sure that God is good?"

9. Are we inclined to despair because Jesus is so far above us? Should we?

10. How far did Jesus lay down rules for us to follow? In what sense is he our authority to-day? What is the difference between taking Jesus seriously and taking him literally?

11. What are some of the theories that have been advanced to explain the fact that for the sincere follower Jesus is Saviour?

12. How can we best study Jesus?

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CHAPTER IV

THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AN ART

Scripture References: I Kings 18:25-29; Ps. 27:10; Matt. 7:7-12; Luke 11:42-52; 15:17, 18; John 3:1-15; 6:35-40; Eph. 6:10-20; Heb. 12:1-13.

Fellowship with God in Christ, a vital Christian experience, is possible for you and me only if we are willing to pay the price. This fellowship is in the nature of an art, and as such must be both learned and practiced.

Two feelings tend to grip us when we pause to realize, as doubtless all of us do at times, that our spiritual life is not what it should be. One of these is a feeling of futility. We regret that our real religious life is at so low an ebb that we are spiritually anæmic. We say to ourselves, "But, after all, what is there that I can do about it?" We remember the words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemus: "The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit," John 3:8. We feel that the most we can do is to wait until, in some mysterious way, God calls us into fellowship with him. It seems to us futile to try to do anything about the matter.

The second feeling which often grips us is one of recoil against any attempt to induce within us or within others concern for spiritual things. It seems to us bordering on sacrilege to suggest ways and means by which men can come to God. Such a fellowship seems to us too sacred a thing to be subject to any laws whatsoever.

Neither of these feelings should be allowed to sway us. If our spiritual life is not what we would have it be, if our fellowship with God is constantly broken, the responsibility is very distinctly upon our own shoulders. There is something which we can and should do about it. Few things are more important for us than just fearlessly to face this sobering fact that, if we will, we may live from day to day as in his presence.

THE CONSTANCY OF GOD

God remains ever the same. It matters not what our attitude toward him may be; his attitude of constant love toward us never varies. We need not win his good grace. We need not induce in him good will toward us. He is not subject to moods as are we. Even though we see "change and decay in all around" us, the One who changes not abides with us still. Far beyond the most perfect and constant love we know on earth stands the love of God toward us. The psalmist saw this when he said, Ps. 27:10,

"When my father and my mother forsake me,
Then Jehovah will take me up."

Very seldom, indeed, is it that parents forsake their children; the heavenly Father *never* forsakes his children.

The most elaborate rites and rituals have been built around the idea that in some way man must placate and win the favor of the Infinite. Sacrifices, penances, pilgrimages have been made, those things which man held dearest have been put aside, that in some way he might change the attitude of his god toward him. You will recall the taunting remarks of the prophet to the priests of Baal as they were cutting themselves with knives and lancets, thus beseeching Baal to send down fire to consume the sacrifice. I Kings 18:25-29. Even

to-day men have the feeling that they must curry the favor of the Almighty, must change him.

God stands ready now and always for us to come to him. We need not beg him to open his arms and his heart toward us. They are open. He stands ready to receive us. Upon him and upon his love we can always count. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37.

SAINTS DO NOT HAPPEN

When we see veritable saints of God we are wont to envy them. They seem to us those whom the Lord has specially chosen. They are favored above the rest of us. Life seems so simple and plain for them. We feel that if they had been endowed at birth as we have been, or if they had had the lives to live that we have had, the outcome might have been different. What we fail to see is that they do not just happen to be saints. They were not so born, nor were the materials of life given to them so that inevitably out of those materials they must achieve sainthood. What we see and admire is the fruitage, the finished product. We cannot see the days and months and years of effort and discipline that went into the making of their personalities. They have won their way through, coming down a long, arduous, and, many times, painful road. We, too, may be able to attain as they have, if we are willing to pay the price they have paid.

If you and I are to come into a full and satisfying fellowship with God in Christ we shall, perhaps, have to fight our way through many and sore difficulties. It will not be ours for the mere asking. Jesus indeed said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," Matt. 7:7. At no point is this more true than in seeking God himself. How infinitely much, however, is at times involved in the asking, the seeking, and the

knocking! Saints are not born saints, nor do they arrive by forces over which they have no power. We are foolish indeed if we think that we can go indolently on our way expecting that some day, by the grace of God, we shall be caught up into fellowship with him, there to remain forever at rest. It is, many times, by a rough road that men come to God; and it is, many times, by constant struggle that this fellowship remains unbroken.

CAPACITY MUST BE DEVELOPED

It is incumbent upon each man to develop that capacity for fellowship with God which is his precious possession.

1. A Native Capacity. Of course, a student to-day is very chary of saying that any trait is native. He dares not mention an instinct unless he has consulted the latest authorities, and then he will have to take his choice. This is for the simple reason that we have not yet devised means of determining accurately which traits and tendencies in our lives are the result of heredity and which are the result of environment. Every man born into the world has within himself the capacity to know God. The old statement of Augustine, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and the heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in Thee," still holds true. Ours is a capacity only. It is possible for us to enter into fellowship. We have it in our power to know God, but it does not inevitably follow that we shall know him.

2. Neglect Stunts Growth. It is, seemingly at least, possible for a man so to neglect to develop this capacity within himself that it is well-nigh lost. Not that it is ever completely lost, but it is for many long years stunted, and so a man cheats himself of the finest that life holds for him. This capacity lies dormant in some people, remaining as it was when they were children. It is neglected and so does not develop.

God never despairs of any man, and it is never too late for a man to turn to God. In the story of the Prodigal Son, there is a phrase which is one of the finest compliments the Master paid sinful men. The son, after spending his substance and himself in the far country, turns his eyes toward home. The words are: "When he came to himself he said, . . . I will arise and go to my father," Luke 15:17, 18. When we come to ourselves, our real selves, we always start back toward the Father's house and his love.

3. Laws of Growth. There are laws of spiritual growth. There are exercises which will develop that capacity within us. We need not start to work out the whole scheme of development alone. It may be that some of us are geniuses enough to do that, but most of us are not. The person born with a capacity to make music might find his own way and at long last produce great music. He would, however, be a fool not to put himself in the hands of the masters of music, living and dead, that, discovering through them those exercises which they have found helpful, he might profit thereby. The man who, no matter how great a native capacity he may have, disdains all exercises and laws in the development of this capacity for fellowship with God is equally foolish.

TWO ESSENTIALS

There are two prime essentials in developing the art of the Christian experience. One is discipline and the other is practice.

1. Discipline. How whole-heartedly do we despise the word "discipline"! We will have none of it in any sphere, especially in the sphere of religion. Yet one of our greatest needs in every sphere is discipline, and especially in the sphere of religion. Two books have recently come from the press,

one by a man who is one of the world's foremost medical men, the other by a noted practical psychologist. Both of them come back time and again to the need of discipline in life. As E. Stanley Jones says, in the introduction to "I Follow the road": "There is nothing that modern Christianity needs more than it needs spiritual discipline. Modern Christianity is haphazard and hand-to-mouth. We tell people to 'be good,' but we don't give them a technique of the good life."¹

Most of us will, no doubt, have to acknowledge that we do not take very seriously the development of our spiritual lives. We feel that we shall have fellowship without any particular attention or effort on our part. But we cannot expect to get very far until, as Dr. William Adams Brown suggests, we "treat our search for God at least as seriously as we treat our friendships and our business."²

There is no easy way. A religion which is easy is a travesty on the religion in which the cross is the focal point. We have all grown morally soft by too much spiritual coddling. We insist on being pampered and petted. Dean Inge has suggested that the last line of the old hymn be changed:

"They climbed the steep ascent of heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain:
O God, to us may grace be given
To follow by the train."

Paul is wont to speak of the follower of Christ as an athlete, and so does the author of Hebrews, Heb. 12:1-13. The Christian is a runner, running his race in the sight of the departed, admonished to "lay aside every weight," especially the weight of sin, that he may "run with patience" the race set

¹ "I Follow the Road," by Anne Byrd Payson. The Abingdon Press, 1933.

² "Pathways to Certainty," page 257. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930.

before him. For this race the strictest of discipline is necessary. Paul also frequently employs the figure of the warrior, who again must practice the most severe discipline. Eph. 6:10-20. We need to be athletes of the spirit if we are to attain to the highest fellowship with God. Thus Professor Moffatt translates the familiar passage from Hebrews: "Discipline always seems for the time to be a thing of pain, not of joy; but those who are trained by it reap the fruit of it afterwards in the peace of an upright life. So up with your listless hands! Strengthen your weak knees! And make straight paths for your feet to walk in," Heb. 12:11-13.

2. Practice. Like all arts, fellowship with God must be constantly practiced. If for but a short while we fail, we may well expect to find it difficult to realize his presence and his love. One of our great musicians is credited with saying that if he failed to practice for one day he knew it; if he failed to practice for one week his critics knew it; if he failed to practice for a month his public knew it. In the field of music the greatest of musicians constantly practice the most rudimentary exercises. Mr. Olin Downes, music critic of The New York Times, told of a visit to Paderewski in his beautiful home on the shore of Lake Geneva. The great musician who for a generation has thrilled vast audiences around the world was preparing for another concert tour. One morning Mr. Downes heard music from an upper story, and the music the master was playing consisted of scales, played slowly, *legato* and staccato.

Holman Hunt, the artist, once said to a woman who asked him how she could learn to make perfectly drawn free-hand circles like his that all she had to do was to practice eight hours a day for forty years. It matters not what art one is considering, proficiency is attained and maintained only

by persistent practice. This holds true in the greatest of all arts, that of fellowship with God.

Few, if any, truly valuable assets of life are ours without effort. There is no short cut or easy road into communion with the Father of us all. There is a way, for some a long and difficult way, of discipline and practice. The beauty of it is that if we seek we shall find, that the way will bring us to the desired end if we but follow through.

AIDS TO COMMUNION

There are no new ways to God. We are to consider later the old and tried ways. We may dislike the word "technique," yet it stands for a real thing, and in the years to come men will doubtless perfect better methods of approach than now we know. The late Charles P. Steinmetz, the noted electrical genius, said: "Some day people will learn that material things do not bring happiness and are of little use in making men and women creative and powerful. Then the scientists of the world will turn their laboratories over to the study of God and prayer and spiritual forces which as yet have been hardly scratched. When this day comes, the world will see more advancement in one generation than it has seen in the last four." We may not agree with the statement that God has to be discovered by the scientist, but it is true certainly that the study of spiritual forces has hardly been "scratched," and that the world waits for just these forces.

As Protestant Christians, we are wary of anything which makes religion seem mechanical, and rightly so. At the same time we must not disdain any proper help in finding God. For instance, we confine ourselves too much to the use of the one sense of hearing. There seems no justifiable reason why the other senses should not be appealed to as well. Other men have found these helpful, and what they have found helpful

we, too, may find of service. We should constantly be searching out all the means employed by men of old in entering into the Christian experience, while at the same time we are making our small contribution to those who will follow us.

DANGERS

It cannot be denied that there are grave dangers inherent in learning and practicing the art of fellowship with God. But because a thing is held to be dangerous does not mean that it is not good. Not long ago I was accused of overstatement because I said that a certain practice was dangerous. My critic said that I was thus guilty of overstatement because such a practice is "often very useful." To prove that there are dangers in any procedure does not prove that the procedure is not good but only that it is dangerous.

1. Means and Ends. It is so easy for that which is very helpful as a means to become definitely harmful when it becomes an end. This has been true of most religious practices. It was a very prevalent evil in the religious life that Jesus faced, and against none did the Master bring stronger accusations than against those who so blinded the eyes and dulled the hearts of the people. To the Pharisees the rites and rituals were matters of prime importance in themselves and not as aids to spiritual life. Rites and rituals are good, but they are distinctly lesser matters. Thus it was that Jesus rebuked those who had exalted means into ends: "But woe unto you Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and every herb, and pass over justice and the love of God: but these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone," Luke 11:42.

2. Deadening Effect. There seems to be a deadening effect in the persistent performance of any rite or ritual, no

matter how fine it is. Gradually, and without our being conscious of it, the whole matter becomes mechanical and loses its true significance and meaning. So it becomes harmful and not helpful.

Many are the other dangers inherent in man's efforts to practice the presence of God. This does not mean that they should not be employed but only that they should be employed with discrimination, ever keeping in view the purpose—communion with God.

NO COST TOO GREAT

No price is too great for a man to pay if thereby he attains communion with the Infinite. Our lives are forever incomplete and impoverished unless we have learned to know God, and unless we constantly pursue this greatest of all arts. When we are inclined to despair, let us come back again and again to the fact that the fault is ours; that, if we will, God may be known of us. Dean Inge says: "But for the testimony of the great cloud of witnesses, who have mounted higher and seen more, I should not have ventured to build so much on this immediate revelation of God to the human soul. But the evidence of the saints seems to me to be absolutely trustworthy; and the dimness of my own vision would be disquieting only if I felt that I had deserved better. The Pearl of great price is not so easily found. But do we know of any who have sought after the knowledge of God as diligently as other men seek after wealth and honor, and have come away empty-handed?"³

Every man has within him the capacity to know God. Whether or not that capacity shall be developed rests with the individual. God ever remains the same. It is by discipline

³ "Outspoken Essays," Second Series, by William Ralph Inge, page 15. Longmans, Green & Co., 1922. Used by permission.

and practice that a vital Christian experience is attained and maintained.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of speaking of the Christian experience as an art?

2. Does God love the sinner as much as he loves the saint?

3. Trace the lives of some of the saints, such as Paul and Augustine, showing the struggles through which they passed.

4. Does the capacity to know God ever develop without the attention of the individual?

5. Is the capacity to know God ever lost?

6. What place should discipline have in life in general? in the spiritual life?

7. Do we fail because we are unwilling to practice or because we do not comprehend the need of constant practice?

8. Will the scientist ever be able to find God and to teach us how to find him, or is it the most the scientist can ever hope to do to describe for us some of the ways in which God works? What would you say of the statement quoted from Charles Steinmetz?

9. As Protestants, have we thrown over much in the way of rite and ritual which we should have kept?

10. Suggest other spheres in which means become ends. Is the Church a means or an end?

11. Suggest other dangers in the attempt to practice the presence of God.

12. Do men ever honestly seek God and fail to find him?

CHAPTER V

DIFFICULTIES

Scripture References: Ex. 23:2; I Kings 20:35-43; Isa., ch. 6; Matt. 5:1-2; 18:1-6; Luke 18:9-14; I Chor. chs. 13; 16:1-8; Gal. 2:21; II Peter 3:14-18.

To dwell on difficulties is not sound policy. It should, however, prove helpful to bring into the clear light the peculiar problems we must face as we work toward a vital Christian experience. Thus may we be forewarned, and so move more swiftly toward a triumphant issue. "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." I Cor. 16:9. The same spirit should be ours as actuated the Apostle Paul when he faced the difficulties at Ephesus. Our problems and difficulties should never dismay or discourage us, but merely act as a challenge, bringing to us strength to overcome.

That our spiritual life presents to us many problems is a most salutary thing. "A problem is a sign of life. The more life, the more problems. . . . A problem, then, is not a calamity, nor a disgrace, nor a trial, nor a hindrance, nor failure. A problem in personal terms is a state of confusion due to the realization that the present situation is so markedly dissatisfying that something must be done about it."¹ Let us, then, rejoice that our relationship to God presents itself as such a problem.

¹ "Normative Psychology of Religion," by Henry Nelson Wieman, page 392. Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1935.

DIFFICULTIES AND EXCUSES

We are prone to give plausible excuses for our failures. Such excuses act as a solace to us; woe be to us if they ever satisfy! We may give many reasons why we fail to have fellowship with God; there is no excuse. When we see others making excuses for their failure to do their duty, we see how flat such excuses fall. I Kings 20:35-43. To show that a thing is hard in no wise absolves us from responsibility. Difficulties can never serve as excuses.

FOOLING OURSELVES

All of us have infinite capacity to fool ourselves. Sometimes we delude ourselves far more completely than we do other people. We aim to be honest. We think we face up squarely to our tasks. We think we know why we do this and why we do not do that. Yet all the while we may be acting from motives that are far removed from those that we consciously accept. Thus do we play tricks with ourselves. The Socratic admonition, "Know thyself," is very sound advice, but not easily acted upon. We should be constantly on our guard lest in this most important of all fields, our relation to God, we mislead ourselves. We must not consciously or unconsciously throw up smoke screens to hide our own failures. We are all given to rationalization, acting from one set of motives and then justifying our actions by conjuring up an entirely different set.

It would be an endless task to set down all the difficulties which confront us. The following list is suggestive rather than exhaustive. Some of these could, perhaps, be included under general classifications, but they are listed separately that thus they may stand out.

1. **Temperament.** In a very limited sense only are we created equal. Seemingly from our birth on we differ in capacity. Some fields seem wholly closed to certain people. Some persons come into the world with a love for music, and with a capacity to make music. Others seem to be barred by nature from ever entering into this sphere. Emerson used to say: "Because I have no ear for music the concert of the Quintette Club looked to me as if the performers were crazy, and the audience make-believe crazy, in order to soothe the lunatics and keep them amused."² William Lyon Phelps tells us that he himself used to be bored to tears by symphony concerts, but that he forced himself to go to such concerts, and that now he finds them so enjoyable that he expects to spend a large portion of his time in heaven listening to symphony concerts. In other words, he developed a very meager and latent capacity.

Some of us do have here a very distinct difficulty. We lack the imagination and sensitiveness of spirit which others have. We are veritable Peter Bells:

c "A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more."

If we are of this type, we have a difficulty which some others may not have. We may not arrive so quickly or so easily, but once having arrived we hold the more steadily to the position attained. The steady, quiet, plodding! These are they who win in the lifelong race. By their thoroughness they put others to shame. The Master seemed to have no rebuke for Thomas when the disciple insisted that he would not believe until he saw the print of the nails. John 20:25.

² Quoted in "Adventure for Happiness," by S. Parkes Cadman, page 214. The Macmillan Company, 1935. Used by permission.

The peculiar difficulty in discerning spiritual things which lies before people of certain temperaments is very real but it is not insurmountable. Men of temperament similar to yours have won over all obstacles and have entered into vitalizing fellowship with the heavenly Father.

2. Intellectual Difficulty. Perhaps no difficulty is so prevalently used as a smoke screen as is that of the intellect. This is done both consciously and unconsciously. As Dr. Buttrick puts it, "It is true that some of our doubt is the scum on the top of unruly conduct—a curdling of the stomach that clouds the mind."³ Yet the intellectual problem is a very real difficulty for many people. It is neither fair nor helpful to disregard or belittle such problems. They should be faced fairly and squarely. While many of them must remain forever unsolved, we dare not disregard them; nor dare we, as Bishop Gore suggests some preachers are doing, succumb to the tendency to seek refuge from the difficulties of thought in the opportunities for action.

It is not inconsistent to proceed in inspiring fellowship, even while unable to analyze it and intellectually to comprehend it. A student, greatly disturbed, came to his teacher in a theological seminary and asked how a person could be intellectually honest in praying when he could not understand prayer. The wise teacher asked the young man if he could understand love. When he received a negative reply, he said, "Yet you continue to love your mother, even though you cannot analyze or define love." It is a worthy answer. It would be as unjustifiable to refuse to enter into fellowship with God because all intellectual problems cannot be satisfactorily solved as to refuse to enjoy the blessings of human fellowship because we cannot understand all the intellectual problems involved therein.

³ "Jesus Came Preaching," by George A. Buttrick, page 80. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931.

There is much truth in the extravagant statement of Mr. G. K. Chesterton that only "materialists and madmen never have doubts." ⁴ Not the man who has never had a doubt but the man who has had doubts and has conquered them is the safe guide. "A pain in the mind," to use Studdert-Kennedy's significant expression, is many times very salutary.

"With me, belief means
Perpetual unbelief kept quiet,
Like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe."

Perhaps the final answer to this, as to all our difficulties, is that men of the most profound acumen have faced all the intellectual problems involved and have still found a most powerful fellowship with God in Christ.

3. Changing Conceptions. This difficulty could have been classified under "intellectual difficulty" because it is primarily intellectual. In some quarters we hear advocated belief in a changing God. Such can never be satisfactory to the Christian. God does not change; our conception of him changes, and should change. It is not a mark of great faith for adults to think of God in exactly the same terms as they did when they were children. Childlike faith is beautiful, but childish faith is at times very unlovely. So often with a shaking of the head, as if it were a tragic matter, we quote the old words:

"I remember, I remember
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky;
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heaven
Than when I was a boy'."

⁴ "Orthodoxy," page 40. John Lane Company, 1909.

Who wants to be brought closer to heaven by a "childish ignorance"? Surely the mature conception of heaven is more helpful than the childish idea of a physical place just beyond the tree tops.

As we develop and grow, our conception of God should develop and grow with us. The lower conception must give place to the higher. God and the Christian fellowship should mean infinitely more to us as we grow in years and experience. Growth must continue so long as there is life. We must "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," II Peter 3:18.

In his great poem on love, Paul said that when he became a man he "put away childish things," I Cor. 13:11. We, too, should do this, including our childish conceptions of God.

4. Social Pressure. So quickly does social pressure begin to register its power over human life that with all the scientific methods yet available we cannot tell what are the forces of heredity and what of environment. From the cradle to the grave we are all molded by the well-nigh irresistible force of social pressure. It requires real strength of character to stand out against it. This force is not always evil—not by a great deal. Many a student has been kept back from an ignoble act by the simple reminder that such a thing just "isn't done." Yet this force is one of the greatest difficulties we have to face. It is not a peculiarly popular thing to-day to cultivate the spiritual life. Men and women all around us seem to give no thought to this matter. Then why should we? This is the question we ask ourselves. Three thousand years ago an admonition was given that is just as pertinent to-day as then: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil," Ex. 23:2. There is no moral safety in numbers. Moral questions cannot be decided by majority vote. Individual responsibility never ceases.

The strong as well as the weak succumb to social pressure. Tolstoy, whom certainly no one could call a moral coward, tells us that when he was about eighteen he met in Paris an older brother from whom he had been separated for some time. They occupied the same room. When bedtime came the older brother climbed into bed, but Tolstoy, as was his custom, knelt at the bed and prayed. As he rose from his knees his brother said in disdain, "You still do that?" It was all that he said; but it was enough. Tolstoy did not say his prayers again for almost twenty years.

It is a real test of character to stand alone. It requires a heroism far more superb than that required to face shot and shell. A character in a recent novel says: "I won't be the slave of my circumstances. . . . I will recognize them, because that is a prerequisite to changing them. I may even be their product, as far as my social person is concerned: but my social person is itself only a circumstance to be judged and altered by my immortal reason." Down the full length of life's road we may expect to have to stand out against the social pressure which bids us conform. Society is not concerned with righteousness but only with conformity. The man who rises above the morality of the mob is meted out the same punishment as the man who falls below. Without the city's walls there were three crosses. Two of those crosses carried the bodies of common felons, men who had fallen below the accepted standards; the third cross carried the body of One who had risen above the standards of his day.

5. Preoccupation with the Physical. Certainly "the world is too much with us" all. "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." The inexorable demands of necessity drive most of us. Forced to deal so constantly with the things of life, we well-nigh forget that there are higher values. Not only so, but the constant contact with the physical seems to

dull and blunt our spirits to the higher values life should hold for us.

6. Spiritual Impoverishment. Many people rejoice at the loss of appetite for spiritual things. They have a sense of freedom and boast of the fact that the things of the spirit no longer concern them. A mother might as well rejoice at her child's loss of appetite because no longer would she have to provide food. If our spiritual lives are so far undernourished that we do not crave spiritual food, our condition is fraught with grave danger indeed.

7. Impatience. It requires infinite patience and persistence to achieve in any art. Surely these are required in the art of fellowship with God. In one of his letters Brother Lawrence summed up the attitude of most of us: "She seems to me to be full of good will, but she would go faster than grace. One does not become holy all at once." It does seem that progress is so slow! We covet fellowship with God and we seek to find him, but the road seems so long. We grow impatient, and too often we give up.

"Heaven is not reached at a single bound;
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit round by round."

8. Self-Reliance. It may seem a contradiction after stressing man's responsibility for his own spiritual condition now to say that one of the greatest of our difficulties in achieving the Christian experience is reliance on self. This is, however, not a contradiction. We must meet the conditions; we must put ourselves in touch with the Infinite; but only the Spirit of God can give to us strength and wisdom. In only a very limited degree are we the masters of our fate. A whole new school of religious thought is to-day stressing

the fact that God is everything and man is nothing; that apart from God man can do nothing. Though we may not go the whole length with this school (the Barthian), we should recognize that we may be too self-reliant, even when we are dealing with God.

To his disciples Jesus said, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven," Matt. 18:3. To those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous Jesus told the story of the two men who went up into the Temple to pray. You will recall that it was the humble and penitent publican and not the self-righteous Pharisee who was accepted. Luke 18:9-14. Reliance on self rather than on God is a hurdle that all of us meet in our Christian race. The most we can hope to do is not to frustrate the grace of God. Gal. 2:21.

9. Crushing Calamity. A great calamity either sweetens or sours the soul. It may be a wind which beats us down and cripples us or a wind which enables us to soar to undreamed-of heights. What effect it shall have on us when the world comes crashing down around our heads is entirely up to us. Men have used such experiences to bring them closer to God and to drive them farther from God.

Isaiah was one of those men who made of the winds of adversity a force driving him to the desired haven. In his account of his call to become a prophet, he begins: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," Isa. 6:1. The year that King Uzziah died was for Isaiah far more than a date in history. It marked a major calamity. It meant the end of all his most worthy ambitions. It marked a dark hour. But then was the time that Isaiah saw the Lord. Many others souls have found God in such times. That which might have been a great hindrance has rather become a great help.

Dr. A. Herbert Gray, in his book "Finding God," says: "Thirty years ago I asked an old man in London whether he would care to live his life over again on condition that it would turn out exactly the same life as he had lived. I was prepared to hear a fervent 'God forbid' because that is what many would say. But after thinking for a while this man replied deliberately, 'Yes, and especially would I like to live again through my times of trouble.' Being young and inexperienced, I asked in great astonishment, 'But why?' To which he replied, 'Because it was in those times that I learned most of what I know about God'." ⁵ The psalmist gave his testimony:

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted;
That I may learn thy statutes."

Ps. 119:71.

A crushing calamity visited upon us or ours may be a difficulty in the Christian experience, but out of this very calamity we may, by the power of God, make a means of grace.

"Light songs we breathe that perish with our breath
Out of our lips that have not kissed the rod.
They shall not live who have not tasted death.
They only sing who are struck dumb by God."

10. Sin. The one difficulty beside which all others pale into insignificance is that of the sin in our own hearts. We cling to our sin. We think we truly want God, but we want our sin at the same time. We wonder why we do not see God. We so soon forget the words of our Master, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God," Matt. 5:8. It is the impurity of our own hearts that dulls our vision and keeps us back from fellowship with the heavenly Father.

⁵ Page 105. Harper & Brothers, 1931. Used by permission.

Perhaps, with the exception of the last, which is certainly common to us all, the particular difficulties suggested are not those which cause you the gravest concern. But whatever your difficulties are, here is the thing to be said: not one of them is insurmountable. Men have overcome them and have found fellowship with God in Christ. Whatever your difficulty may be, it is not a legitimate excuse for any failure.

QUESTIONS

1. How far are we wise in dwelling on religious problems and difficulties?
2. Make a list of the particular difficulties some of the saints, such as Peter, Philip, Thomas, and Augustine, had to face. List the peculiar difficulties you have to face.
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages people of different temperaments have?
4. Should a person expect always to have intellectual problems in connection with religion?
5. Are your ideas about God changing? Should they?
6. What is the greatest help in withstanding social pressure?
7. How may a man save himself from too great pre-occupation with the physical?
8. Do people to-day want the gospel?
9. How may we learn patience? We are always in a hurry and God never seems to be.
10. How far should we follow the school of thinkers headed by Karl Barth?
11. Is it the calamities that come to us or the troubles that come to those we love that we find most difficult to reconcile with the love of the heavenly Father?
12. In what ways is sin a major obstacle in the path to God?

CHAPTER VI

THE BIBLE •

Scripture References: Ps. 119:105; John 5:30-47; 20:30, 31; II Cor. 3:1-11; Gal. 3:23-29; II Tim. 2:14-19; 3:14-17; James 4:1-10.

We come now to the practical part of our study. If, as we have been saying, the experience of God in Christ is basic in our religion and it is only our "estranged faces that miss the many-splendored thing," what are we going to do about it? The personal problem is not in accepting a theory but in aspiring to action. We now consider some definite steps toward a vital Christian experience.

There are, as has been said, no new paths to communion with God, nor any way that is easy or free from pitfalls. Millions, however, have passed over the old roads and thus have attained and kept a fine fellowship with God. There is no magic in the matter. The real requirement is our willingness to exert ourselves in achieving such an attitude of heart and mind that the Holy Spirit can work in and through us. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." James 4:8.

• STUDY, NOT PRAISE

When we take up the consideration of Bible study we are always in grave danger lest we shall allow ourselves to be satisfied with praising the Bible and not set ourselves to the serious study of it. It is so easy to exhaust ourselves in encomiums and be none the better! The Word of God does

not need our commendation or our defense. The acceptance of the most extravagant statements about the book will not make us better Christians. Indulgence in argument may even impoverish us.

1. Theories of Inspiration. The heart of the Church and the hearts of individuals have been torn asunder by controversy over theories of inspiration. Men have fought ferociously and at great personal cost in defense of their own interpretations. One must admire their zeal, if not always their wisdom. Nor would I suggest that in all cases this controversy has been to no avail. We must remember, however, that theories are to explain facts and facts are never to substantiate theories. While no considerable group of Christians could find a formula of inspiration acceptable to all, and while they would probably end in limitless discussion if they tried, yet they could agree that for them and for all followers of the Nazarene here is "the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice."

2. The Fact of the Bible. The fact of the Bible remains, however men may dispute in regard to theories about it. Limiting this fact to our present discussion, the Book has brought men into companionship with God—men from Timothy to Kagawa.

The task confronting us is not to discover a theory of inspiration upon which we may agree, nor to give ourselves in fulsome praise, but rather to set ourselves to the study of the Bible. "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth." II Tim. 2:15.

SPIRIT AND LETTER

The Apostle Paul, who was always a protagonist for personal freedom, gave utterances to a great statement in his

second letter to the Corinthians: "For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," ch. 3:6. We are inclined to use this fine statement as an excuse for our indolence, a thing which certainly Paul never intended.

1. **Letter Essential to Spirit.** We cannot hope to catch the spirit of any document until we first know the letter. True, knowing the letter is only a first step, and we defeat our purpose if we stop there, yet it is an essential step.

No one would deny that to-day there is an appalling ignorance of the content of the Bible. Recently a superintendent of schools told me of some investigations made in his school, and of the abysmal lack of the most superficial Biblical knowledge which had been discovered among the pupils. Nor do we have to turn to our children. Ignorance is rampant in our churches and among our most earnest workers. One time the teacher of a class of lovely young Juniors in a Sunday School asked me about the appropriateness of the name "The Mary Magdalenes" for her class of girls. Somehow this ignorance of Scripture seems to us very funny. It should appeal to us as quite otherwise than humorous. It is a tragedy and nothing to cause mirth.

It is true enough that it is not sufficient to know the letter of Holy Writ; but it is just as true that you cannot hope to catch the spirit until you first know the letter.

2. **"The Letter Killeth."** Not all Bible study is helpful; some is definitely harmful. When knowledge of the contents of the Bible becomes the objective in our study, and we go no farther than that, our study becomes inimical to spiritual experience. Some of us, no doubt, have known persons who have spent weeks and months and years in this type of study. It has qualified them for nothing. They know the letter, but their spirits have remained untouched. Personally I have known a good many women who have taken one particular

so-called Bible course, a most exhaustive and prolonged study of the letter, and almost without exception those women, so far as I could judge, have not been bettered one whit; most of them have been largely incapacitated thereby for the work of the Church. To all of us who unduly exalt the letter come Jesus' words of rebuke: 'Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and ye will not come to me, that ye may have life,' John 5:39, 40.

THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE

In The Gospel According to John there is this declaration of the purpose of the book: "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name," ch. 20:31. For us there is a like purpose controlling the whole of our sacred writings. In one of his letters to Timothy, Paul thus states the purpose of Scripture: "The sacred writings . . . are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work," II Tim. 3:15-17.

I. Profitable for Teaching. Taking first the "also" part of Paul's statement, the Bible is profitable for teaching. The immediate question comes, "For teaching what?" The Bible is not an encyclopedia. There are many things that it was never intended to teach. There have been heartaches without number because men have thought that the Bible teaches everything a man needs to know about anything. It is not a textbook on science. While it does contain much history, its purpose is not to teach history. The Bible teaches those things which affect a man's eternal destiny. "What do the

Scriptures principally teach?" "The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man."

2. Profitable for Reproof, for Correction. Sin and its results are writ large across every page of the Bible. That deadly thing which enters in to alienate a man from his Creator is treated in this message. We find here the history of nations and individuals who have forgotten God and followed their own way. We can hear the entreating, the beseeching, the commanding words of a Moses, an Isaiah, a Jeremiah. The Brahman who heard read the sins listed in the first chapter of Romans insisted that the words were written by one conversant with his people. The language spoken is universal; the writers knew the human heart.

"It takes the suffering-human race,
It reads each wound, each weakness clear;
And strikes its finger on the place,
And says, 'Thou ailest here and here!'"

3. Profitable for Instruction in Righteousness. This is sometimes expressed as "moral discipline." What teachers of righteousness the old prophets were! They were surpassed only by the One who himself personified the righteousness which all others have only taught.

4. For a Complete Life. This teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness is "that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." Without the Book no man is complete. "The students that read, mark, and assimilate this book will find that it will strengthen and enrich their souls and enable them to live a great life that is hid with Christ in God."¹

¹ "The Making and Meaning of the New Testament," by James H. Snowden, page 297. The Macmillan Company, 1923.

5. **Wise Unto Salvation.** The values in the Bible of which we have just been thinking are of great importance, but the primary purpose of the Bible is to make us "wise unto salvation." It is to bring us into fellowship with the heavenly Father. Apart from him our lives are lost. With him we shall find fullness of life, both here and hereafter.

6. **Through Faith in Christ.** The person of Christ is the Jewel of the Bible. Around this central setting of transcendent beauty there are a myriad others which shine forth with undimmed luster. There is around all a setting of history, story, poetry, drama, epistle; but the Jewel beyond price which the Bible contains is the Christ. The words of the Old Testament are the history of struggle and hardship, of sin and misery, of joy and sorrow, of achievement and failure, of discovery and revelation, leading up to the Babe of Bethlehem. The Gospels give us the account of his matchless life. The Epistles explain him. Around him all center. Around him must our lives and our study center.

c. "Break Thou the bread of life,
Dear Lord, to me,
As thou didst break the loaves
Beside the sea;
Beyond the sacred page
I seek Thee, Lord;
My spirit pants for Thee,
O living Word."

THE PURPOSE OF BIBLE STUDY

The Bible may be studied for many different purposes, and all legitimately. It is a veritable storehouse of the world's best literature. There are the oft-quoted words of Professor Phelps that a knowledge of the Bible without a college education is more valuable than a college course without the Bible.

Hamilton Wright Mabie gave his judgment that "there is power enough in it to revive a decaying age or give a new date and a fresh impulse to a race which has parted with its creative energy." Yet *the* object of the Bible is that of "furnishing all varieties of man with sufficient light to lead them to God."

The primary purpose of our Bible study must be to find God, and thus to achieve a vital Christian experience. Not only the law, but all of sacred Scripture, is a "tutor to bring us unto Christ," Gal. 3:24.

MANNER OF APPROACH

Very reverently should we take up the study of our Bible. True reverence implies much more than at first we are inclined to think. We should come with open minds and hearts, not determined to use our Bibles to buttress our positions and notions, but to be guided into fuller truth and knowledge. Decent teachableness is not easily achieved. There seems too frequently to be a tendency on the part of deeply religious people to close their minds. For some years I knew, or thought I knew, a man. He seemed to me to exemplify, to a very unusual degree, the Christian virtues. Then one day there came under consideration a departure from the old way. One member of the group insisted that by the new way all could be taught and educated in the meaning and significance of worship. This man whom I had so respected replied, to my great horror, "But I don't want to learn or be educated in this line." Followers of the One who said, "I am the . . . truth," owe it to him ever to be learners.

A great deal has been discovered about the Bible within recent years. We are now able to reconstruct the days in which it was written as men never have been able to do before. We should welcome every whit of new discovery and

reverent scholarship. "The books of the New Testament [and the Old as well] are historical documents and follow the laws of such records in their origin, authorship, contents, and purpose. They sprang out of concrete historical conditions, and they can be fully understood only as they are viewed in the light of their original environment."²

It ought not to be necessary to say that the Bible gives us a progressive revelation of God. We cannot put it all on a dead level. One day I heard a little girl telling an Old Testament story. When she came to the word Jehovah she substituted "Jesus." I must confess that I winced as she talked. Yet through the centuries the Bible traces this revelation until its culmination in Jesus Christ.

New light is ever breaking forth out of the Scriptures. John Robinson, of Leiden, gave to the Pilgrims, as they were bidding farewell to Holland, his admonition which has now become a classic: "I am persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of his Holy Word."

Reverently, with open minds, eagerly expecting fresh light, we should approach our Bibles.

METHOD OF STUDY

Obviously it is not possible here to go into any details in regard to methods of Bible study. There are many helps that deal with this specifically. As in this whole matter, it must be remembered that people are all alike only in all being different. The method another finds helpful may not be the best method for you.

1. Some Method. It is not so important what method we employ as that we shall have some method. A hit-and-miss handling of Scripture is not worthy of us. The Bible is

² Snowden, *op. cit.*, page 3.

properly spoken of as "the Christian's textbook." As such it should be studied methodically, and not picked up casually and opened at random.

2. Definite Program. We shall get larger results from our study if we set ourselves a definite program of study, by book or topic or whatever way appeals to us, and then keep ourselves to this program. We are not justified in our prevalent feeling that in religion we must not discipline ourselves, that here we should allow our moods and feelings to govern us. We cannot get large results in any field after this manner.

3. Translations. Many have found it rewarding to read the Bible in different translations. Some of us may greatly prefer the King James Version. We ought not to shut our eyes to the fact that many times the fuller truth and the more exact meaning are brought out in another translation. Next to the King James Version, we are most familiar with the American Standard Version. The translations by Drs. Weymouth, Moffatt, and Goodspeed are well worth our thoughtful study.

4. One Danger. We need to be on our guard lest our reading become mechanical, lest as a matter of duty we read so many verses or so many chapters. Thus we rob ourselves of all benefit. Principal Rainey used to say that if he had only three minutes to read his Bible he would spend one in reading and the other two in pondering in the presence of God the meaning of what he had read.

THE BOOK OF BOOKS

These words of Henry van Dyke are among the most beautiful and meaningful words ever penned about the Bible:

"Born in the East and clothed in Oriental form and

imagery, the Bible walks the ways of all the world with familiar feet and enters land after land to find its own everywhere. It has learned to speak in hundreds of languages to the heart of man. It comes into the palace to tell the monarch that he is a servant of the Most High, and into the cottage to assure the peasant that he is a son of God. Children listen to its stories with wonder and delight, and wise men ponder them as parables of life. It has a word of peace for the time of peril, a word of comfort for the day of calamity, a word of light for the hour of darkness. Its oracles are repeated in the assembly of the people, and its counsels whispered in the ear of the lonely. The wicked and the proud tremble at its warning, but to the wounded and the penitent it has a mother's voice. The wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad by it, and the fire on the hearth has lit the reading of its well-worn page. It has woven itself into our deepest affections and colored our dearest dreams; so that love and friendship, sympathy and devotion, memory and hope, put on the beautiful garments of its treasured speech, breathing of frankincense and myrrh.

"Above the cradle and beside the grave its great words come to us uncalled. They fill our prayers with power larger than we know, and the beauty of them lingers on our ear long after the sermons which they adorned have been forgotten. They return to us swiftly and quietly, like doves flying from far away. They surprise us with new meanings, like springs of water breaking forth from the mountain beside a long-trodden path. They grow richer, as pearls do when they are worn near the heart.

"No man is poor or desolate who has this treasure for his own. When the landscape darkens and the trembling pilgrim comes to the Valley named of the Shadow, he is not afraid to enter: he takes the rod and staff of Scripture in his hand;

he says to friend and comrade, 'Good-by; we shall meet again'; and comforted by that support, he goes toward the lonely pass as one who walks through darkness into light."³

Whether one comes as friend or foe to the Bible, if he comes with open mind and heart, he will be led to Christ. It is well authenticated that the great novel "Ben-Hur" was the product of the determination of General Lew Wallace to expose the falseness of the Bible. He undertook the task, urged on by Robert G. Ingersoll, that thus he might deliver the American people from the "Christian superstition." As a basis of his work, General Wallace began to read the Gospels. This brought him to the conclusion that Jesus was a historical character. The question then came that if Jesus was a real person in history, might he not be in the universe just what he said he was? From this he could not escape until on his knees he cried, "My Saviour and my God!" The experience of General Wallace has been duplicated times without number and will be many times more.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
And light unto my path."
Ps. 119:105.

All who so conceive of and so use the written Word, and will follow the lighted path, will find their way to the incarnate Word, and so into vital Christian experience.

³ "Companionable Books and Their Authors," by Henry van Dyke, page 11. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927. Used by permission.

QUESTIONS

1. How important in the devotional study of the Bible is an intellectually acceptable theory of inspiration?
2. Trace the influence of the Bible on civilization.
3. What should be done to dispel the present appalling ignorance of the Bible?
4. Would you accept the statement that some Bible study is definitely harmful?
5. Put into your own words the main purpose of the Bible.
6. A recent book contains this statement: "The final authority for the Church, and especially of Protestants, is the Bible." Would you accept this? Would you qualify it? If so, how?
7. List the purposes of Bible study. What are some of the by-products of Bible study?
8. In an investigation among sixty-seven students from forty-five colleges, conducted by Hugh Moran, it was found that "many students who were letter-perfect in Biblical knowledge were woefully lacking in moral judgment." What was the matter with their Bible study?
9. Are religious people more inclined than others to have closed minds? Can a man be "good but narrow"?
10. What methods of Bible study have you found most helpful? helpful in what ways? What methods were least helpful?
11. Do we fail most frequently because we do not employ a good method of study or because we do not keep everlastingly at our study?
12. Should a man study his Bible from a sense of duty?

CHAPTER VII

DEVOTIONAL LITERATURE

Scripture References: The Book of Ruth; I Kings 8:22-53; Psalms 1; 150; Isa. 40:1-5; John, ch. 17.

While the Bible is incomparably the greatest book of devotional literature, it is not the only one. There are other written materials well worth our study and use as aids toward a vital Christian experience.

Of the Minority. You who are reading these words are of the small minority. This is a simple statement of fact. The vast majority of people read nothing more serious than the daily papers and the popular magazines. In his day Emerson said, "If we should give to the great writers, to Milton, or Bacon, or Wordsworth, the time that we give to the newspapers—but who dare speak of such things?" If Emerson despaired then, what would he have to say now? When one is not disgusted by the vulgarity, one is driven to despair by the puerility, of the mental pabulum upon which people feed. And which of us is not guilty of a sinful waste of time and energy in perusing literature which makes no real contribution to our lives? As we read trash, we think trash; as we think trash, we become trash. The very fact, however, that you are reading on this subject is evidence that you are not of the majority easily satisfied with scum and froth.

Things Old and New. Many who have had their souls fed on the great devotional classics are inclined to feel that the old things are better. Certainly they are good, and we should use that which has proved itself. We should, how-

ever, not rob ourselves by refusing to consider that which is new, just because it is new. Like good householders, we should bring forth "things new and old." Materials are being written, and will be written, which will prove helpful to all who conscientiously use them.

Manner of Reading. As in reading the Bible, we should study devotional literature with open hearts and minds. With sympathetic understanding we must try to enter into the experiences of those who wrote. We must divest ourselves of all prejudice and catch the spirit and purpose of that which we are reading. The critical spirit and attitude are all right in their place, but they should not be carried with us into our use of devotional material. Also, we should consider this discipline important enough to command the time to read unhurriedly. Certainly making time for this is not easily accomplished. Charles Lamb was wont to ask God's blessing before reading Shakespeare. We shall get greater good from our use of devotional literature if we approach it and continue in similar spirit.

Types of Devotional Literature. There are many kinds of literature which give spiritual nourishment. Some of the most nutritive were not intended to be such, but were written for other purposes. The Bible contains all the different types to be found, and yet there are other sources rich in possibilities. We are to consider together five of these kinds. They cannot always be separated. For instance, hymns are both poetry and, at times, prayers, yet for the sake of clarity and convenience we treat them separately.

In this chapter, use of the Scripture references is different in manner from that of the previous chapters. Here they are not used as a basis for our discussion; rather, they constitute examples of the type of devotional literature under consideration.

THE HYMNAL

Second only to the Bible itself stands the Christian hymnal. It is in great measure because it is so largely based on the Bible and draws so copiously in thought and expression from the Bible that the hymnal has the power it has.

1. **The Hebrew Hymnal.** The Early Church took over the Hebrew hymnal as the book of songs. The old Scottish Church would allow nothing else to be sung. While to-day some of our best hymns are from The Psalms, yet we do not use The Psalms to-day only as a hymnal. Rather it has become for us a source of devotional reading. Men turn to it no matter in what mood they find themselves, and always gather help and strength. So, as Christians, we use this Hebrew hymnal as devotional literature. Our Scripture references are the first and the concluding hymns of the psalter, Psalms 1; 150.

2. **The Christian Hymnals.** Although we constantly use the old Hebrew hymnal for devotional purposes, most of us have not used the Christian hymnals in like manner. We think that the place for the Christian books of songs is in the sanctuary. There once or twice a week we use the great hymns of the Church. It has, perhaps, never occurred to many of us that they deserve a wider use. So we neglect a rich source of spiritual refreshment in not making use of the great collections of Christian hymns as purely devotional literature, to be read in private. The hymnal should have a place in the home and study as well as in the church. It should have in the public services of worship a larger place than it now has, but it should also be used in private worship.

It is true that many of our finest hymns are wedded to the tunes to which they are sung. It seems almost like sacrilege to use the words without the music. Yet the very best

of our hymns stand in their own right as poems, irrespective of the tunes. They are the expression of the deep conviction of the Christian soul. As such they live and mold the thinking of generation after generation.

3. Hymnals and Handbooks. Some of the best of our hymnals are now published with accompanying handbooks. These handbooks describe the hymns and tunes, and tell of the authors and in many cases of the peculiar circumstances in which both words and tunes were composed. If we will use these handbooks in connection with the hymns we shall enter more fully into the spirit of the hymns when used, whether in public or in private.

4. A Practical Suggestion. Here is a simple plan which some have found helpful. Take a good hymnal and a handbook to that hymnal; beginning at the first hymn, read each day the description of a hymn as given in the handbook and then very thoughtfully and reverently the words of that hymn. Of course, if one can sing the hymn, so much the better. Some of us dare not attempt the singing of the hymns in private lest the neighbors should send in a riot call. This use of the hymns in turn will prove an enriching experience, and will also enable us to gain more from the great hymns when they are used in public worship.

PRAYERS

Some of our greatest hymns and some of our greatest psalms are prayers. In the Bible there are a number of prayers. In our Scripture references we have suggested two of them. First, there is the fine prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple, I Kings 8:22-53. The second is the best loved of all the prayers in Holy Writ, the prayer of our Master in the upper room, commonly known as "the farewell prayer," John, ch. 17.

1. **Written Prayers.** Many of us have a prejudice against written prayers, both in public worship and in private. We do well if we recognize the fact that this is but a prejudice—and treat it accordingly. Whatever place may be given to written prayers in services of public worship, we can help ourselves toward a vital Christian experience by judicious use of them in private devotions.

2. **Book of Prayers.** Some books of prayers are the distillate of the spiritual experiences of many men, some of them living in different ages and cultures. Through many long centuries these prayers have been enriched and ennobled. Countless throngs have fed their souls upon these venerable and time-hallowed words. Such collections as "The Book of Common Prayer" and "The Book of Common Worship" will bring strength and inspiration to anyone who will use them.

There are, as well, numberless helpful books of prayers written or compiled by individuals. No man can thoughtfully, and in the spirit of prayer, use from day to day such a book of prayers as "The Temple," by W. E. Orchard, without finding his own spirit quickened.

Books of prayer can never be a substitute for the outpouring of one's own spirit, but they can be a supplement and an inspiration. Rightly used, prayers, both ancient and modern, will bring us into closer fellowship with God in Christ.

POETRY

Hymns are poetry, and many of the most inspiring poems are prayers, yet there is much helpful poetry that is not used as hymn material and that is not prayer.

Dr. Hugh T. Kerr tells of a visit with Sir William Robertson Nicoll. In the quiet of the Englishman's study they were discussing things sacred and secular. The great editor

remarked that if he had in his keeping the training of young men for the gospel ministry, he would require them to study carefully the sermons of Spurgeon and also the poets. When asked by Dr. Kerr to interpret the significance of his statement, Sir William said that young men need passion and vision. Spurgeon, he said, would fire their souls and the poets would open their eyes and light up their imagination.¹ Not only ministers but all of us need passion and vision. The great poets will open our eyes and light up our imaginations.

1. **Jesus a Poet.** Jesus Christ was at heart a poet. Who but a poet could have said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these," Matt. 6:28, 29? This may be one reason why we dull-minded, sense-bound people find it so hard to understand and appreciate him.* He did not see a dull, dead world, but a world vivid and alive with significance and meaning.

"A poet died in Galilee
* They stared at him and slew him.
What would they do to you and me
If we should say we knew him?"

2. **"The Soul's Invincible Surmise."** The matter-of-fact people must mark things out in all their detail; the poet is satisfied to suggest. Our spirits must reach up to the infinite Spirit by no well-marked path of logic. We come to God, Augustine said, by love and not by navigation. We must learn "to trust the soul's invincible surmise." *

¹ "The Gospel in Modern Poetry." Fleming H. Revell Company, 1926.

"O world, thou choosest not the better part.
It is not wisdom to be only wise,
And on the inward vision close the eyes,
But it is wisdom to believe the heart.
Columbus found a world and had no chart,
Save one that faith deciphered in the skies;
To trust the soul's invincible surmise
Was all his science and his only art.
Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
That lights the pathway but one step ahead
Across a void of mystery and dread.
Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought divine." ²

3. Increased Imagination. Most of us can never be poets, but by following the poets we can have our imaginations definitely enlarged. Their imagery and ability to see beyond that which our eyes behold will have a very salutary effect upon us. We shall come away from communion with them with our own imaginations more alert. Not only so, but we shall catch with them some glimpse of that which no eye has ever seen.

Professor Dallas Lore Sharp, in a magazine article published a number of years ago, told of being at work in the field one day with his twelve-year-old son. It was a fall day and the crimson was just fading into cold October gray. The lad was standing with a fork in his hand and with his face upturned, watching the flight of wild ducks across the sky.

"He who, from zone to zone," the man commenced, more to himself than to the boy.

As much to himself as to his father, the lad continued, "Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight'."

² George Santayana. Used by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

"Father," he added reflectively, as the bird disappeared down the dusky slope of the sky, "I'm glad I know that piece."

"Why?" the professor asked.

"I see so much more when the ducks fly over."

"How much more do you see?"

"I see the wild ducks and God flying over together."

4. Anthologies. Poor is the man who does not know the souls of the great poets as they have revealed themselves through their works. Well-worn volumes of Tennyson and Browning testify to many an hour of helpful companionship with men who see where the rest of us grope. There are available many anthologies, collection of poems, which have proved their ability to inspire the soul. Such collections as "The World's Great Religious Poetry," by Dr. Caroline Miles Hill, and "Lyra Mystica," by Dr. Charles Carroll Albertson, to mention only two of the many, have proved a veritable boon to many a seeker.

BIOGRAPHY

The best biography is not written as devotional literature, but it is of tremendous value in this field. To live with some of the great spirits of the past, to enter with them into their experiences, to follow in their footsteps as they seek God and the meaning of life—this is to help one's self toward a vital experience.

The Bible is replete with biographies, biographies long and short. Our souls are stirred as we follow Ruth, the Moabite widow, catching her spirit of loyalty and devotion, as she says to her mother-in-law: "Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: Jehovah do so

to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me," Ruth 1:16, 17. Who is not brought closer to the Father of us all by contact with the spirit of such a person?

1. Great Explorers. The great souls of the past have found their way to God, and they bid us follow on. Perhaps we cannot go over the same path that they trod, but we can go. As Dr. Walter Russell Bowie put it in his Yale Lectures, "The great explorers of the world of spirit give to those who follow not so much their maps as their imagination, not so much specification concerning where they went as enough of the joy of their going to make these others also want to go."³

2. Saints and Sinners. As we read biography we are ever impressed with the fact that the sinners and the saints are one and the same. Those who have become the world's greatest saints were the very ones who were the most conscious of their sins. It was due to the very fact that they felt their own unworthiness and so put themselves in the hands of God, leaning only on his grace, that they thus became the men and women they were. We need never despair, for in them we see anew the miracle of the grace of God; we see what a man may become if only he will give himself up to God.

3. A Widening Circle. As we read the lives of great souls we widen our own circle of dear ones. I never saw or heard Phillips Brooks or Alexander Whyte, but I respect and honor and love them—and I feel that I know them far better than I do many living preachers whom I know personally—because their lives have been made plain by their biographers. A. V. G. Allen makes Phillips Brooks live again, and G. F. Barbour makes Alexander Whyte live again.

³ "The Renewing Gospel," page 65. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935.

"Still holy lives
Reveal the Christ of whom the letter told,
And the new gospel verifies the old."

As one keeps goodly company with the martyrs and saints,
his own soul is strengthened for the tasks of life, strengthened by the inspiration to find greatness and the source of all true greatness as they did.

"To-day I have grown taller from walking with the trees,
The seven sister-poplars who go softly in a line;
And I think my heart is whiter for its parley with a star
That trembled out at nightfall and hung above the pine."

How much taller yet do we grow, and how much whiter yet
are our hearts, from walking with those who are made but
"little lower than the angels"!

DEVOTIONAL HANDBOOKS AND HELPS

There are obtainable many handbooks and devotional helps which rightly used will lead us into the divine fellowship. These books combine what the compilers consider the best of materials. Scripture, hymns, prayers, poetry, at times biography, and exhortation are put together for our convenience and spiritual nurture. Such helps as *TO-DAY*, published monthly by the Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, can be made of tremendous value in keeping aglow the fires of devotion. There are many other such helps, some of them of recent issue and others which have proved themselves by use through many years.

Christianity is an inward attitude of spirit and life. At its best it is companionship with God in Christ, a companionship so complete that his purpose is our purpose. So will his strength be our strength. To attain this end is the function of all devotional literature and practice. By their ability to

lead us into this fellowship with the heavenly Father they must be judged.

QUESTIONS

1. How much time do you spend on different kinds of reading? Make an estimate of the time spent reading newspapers, popular magazines, serious magazines, et cetera. How much time do you spend in reading Scripture? other devotional literature?

2. How can we bring ourselves to our reading with the determination to allow the reading to do what it will with us?

3. What are your favorite psalms? Why? Select one to recommend to others.

4. How can we make wider use of our hymnals? Try out your plan and be ready to report on it.

5. How much of your own conception of God and of religion did you get from the hymns of the Church? Formulate your answer.

6. Should we make larger use of written prayers? Is it prejudice that keeps us from using such prayers? Should we cultivate a taste for written prayers? Write or select a prayer for regular use.

7. What books of prayers have you personally found helpful? Find some prayers in the Bible and record the references. For what occasions are they especially useful?

8. Name some of the great religious poems. What poets or poems have you personally found most fruitful. Be prepared to read or recite at least one poem.

9. Besides the psalms, what other poems in the Bible can you locate? Note the references.

10. What are your favorite biographies, and why? Search out biographies and biographical materials in the Bible. Note the references.

11. What devotional handbooks and helps have you found of greatest value? How do you use them? Be ready to report.

12. What types of devotional literature other than those discussed have you found rewarding? Articles? Sermons? Can you make your experience helpful for others?

CHAPTER VIII

PRAYER—ITS MEANING

Scripture References: II Kings 6:8-17; Matt. 6:5-15; Mark 12:28-30; Luke 11:1-4; John 6:22-29; Heb. 1:1-4; James 5:13-18.

Prayer, as William James put it, is the very "soul and essence of religion." It has been said that Christianity is the religion which teaches men to pray. The Master's heart must have leaped with joy when his disciples came to him with the request, "Lord, teach us to pray," Luke 11:1. He knew then that they had discovered the secret of his strength. No one thing do we as individuals need more than to learn to pray. As we pray in very truth we serve the Kingdom, our generation, and ourselves.

PHILOSOPHY NOT ESSENTIAL

When Jesus was besought by his followers to teach them to pray, he did not launch forth into a disquisition. He assumed the fact of prayer and built on this fact. Very rightly, so it seems, do we try to formulate a philosophy for all that we do. We should not accept things blindly and make no inquiry as to the meaning of our acts. We may rest assured that life has meaning. To find that meaning should be our meat and drink. At the same time we should not hesitate to pray until we have formulated a theory in regard to prayer which is intellectually and emotionally satisfying. We should starve to death physically if we refused to eat until we had formulated a philosophy of eating and understood in just what way food was helpful to our physical well-

being. Just so shall we starve to death spiritually if we refuse the nourishment given by prayer until we thoroughly understand its meaning and its practice.

We are, wise and foolish alike, trying better to understand prayer, that thus the better we may practice it. In this chapter we are to think together of the meaning of prayer and in the next of the practice of prayer. Let it be kept clearly in mind that it is incumbent upon us to persist in our practice, even though we cannot fully comprehend the meaning.

I. Science and Prayer. Many of us have the feeling that the discoveries of science have somehow made prayer *passé*. We are not sure just how, but we have heard that it is no longer either necessary or useful to turn to God. We have discovered in recent years a little bit more of the ways in which God works. We have linked up with our puny minds and imaginations a few of the items in that marvelous chain of cause and effect. We know far more about the physical facts than the fathers did. Some rash and childish minds have bowed God out of his universe. Some have concluded that now their understanding is so complete that God is no longer necessary, and they deride the poor benighted souls who still turn to him.

The most scientists have done, or ever will do, is to describe for us some of the ways in which God works. By doing so they have rendered to us, and we pray will continue to render to us, monumental service. However, by all such discovery they but enlarge the circle of our ignorance. Have you ever sat by a camp fire at night when the fire was low? There was but a small circle of light and beyond that circle all was shrouded in darkness and mystery. Then some member of the party heaped on more fuel and the circle of light enlarged. That which before was in darkness was made clear

and stood in distinct outline. At the same time the circle of darkness increased and you realized that you were surrounded with greater mystery and darkness than you had at first supposed. So it is when the light of man's knowledge grows brighter. We see that there is more out beyond than we had ever dreamed. And here in this shadow, even as in the shadow of the cross, stands God, "keeping watch above his own."

2. Intellectual Respectability. We should have a wholesome respect for our minds. They are given us by God and we should love and honor God with them. Mark 12:30. We have no moral right to do that which is irrational. To pray to almighty God is intellectually respectable. Nothing that men have discovered makes prayer either irrational or childish. Much learning has not made us mad in this matter, but little learning has made us foolish. Some of the most profound thinkers the world has ever produced have been men of simple and devout prayer.

I give the testimony of but one of the great thinkers whom I might call to the witness stand. In his book "Science in Search of God," Dr. Kirtley F. Mather, professor of geology at Harvard University, says: "It is my personal belief that prayer not only reacts psychologically to benefit the one who prays; it also puts at the disposal of the transcendental Spirit a tool which, however weak or tiny it may be, is nevertheless indispensable in the project of creating a world which will be an adequate expression of the nature of God."¹ Physical scientists have not discovered anything which makes prayer useless; psychologists have discovered nothing which makes prayer foolish.

While we are assiduously seeking to formulate a philosophy of prayer, we can, and we should, continue to pray.

¹ Pages 129, 130. Henry Holt and Company, 1928.

CHILDISH CONCEPTIONS

We are prone to hold on to childish conceptions of prayer, conceptions which have come down to us from the childhood of the race and conceptions which have come from our own childhood. These childish things must be put away, and we must think as men.

1. Magic. Prayer, and religion itself for that matter, has been in times past—and, alas, in the present time as well—closely linked with magic. It may be, as Bergson suggests, that religion in its primitive form was the cradle in which the race in its infancy rocked itself to sleep from its fears and terrors. Prayer was used as magic to keep the devotee in safety and to assure him the supply of his needs. The tragedy is that prayer is used similarly to-day. It is a far cry from the primitive man, crouching in fear before his gods and entreating in magical formulas, to the simple and loving companionship which Jesus of Nazareth enjoyed with the heavenly Father.

2. Bending God. In prayer we are not bending God to our own wills. We need not come to him to seek his good favor. That favor is always ours. As was pointed out earlier, God is always the same and his attitude toward us is ever one of love and mercy. "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of God's willingness," as an old expression has it. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Matt. 7:11.

3. Begging God. Prayer is at times petition, but it is not always petition; nor is it at its highest in petition. Many times our prayers are but catalogues of our desires. We seem to feel that we have to inform the heavenly Father of our

needs, as if he were neglectful of us. We are like the Gentiles who "think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him," ch. 6:7, 8.

4. Substitute for Effort. Prayer can never be a substitute for effort, mental, physical, or spiritual. It can never relieve us of the necessity of hard thought and hard work. In prayer we are, in a sense, doing the work of the world, but we cannot live apart from the struggle and turmoil of life and feel that we have done our task when we have lifted our hands to God in prayer. Nor can prayer ever be a substitute for intelligence. By prayer our own mental processes should be made more alert and we should with keener minds tackle the problems which confront us.

If we have childish conceptions of prayer, as intelligent adults we shall neglect to pray, or if we do pray, the effectiveness of our prayer will be seriously impaired.

PRAYER AS COMMUNION

Prayer, in its simplest terms, is communion with God. We have defined the Christian experience as "fellowship with God in Christ." That would do well for a definition of prayer. When in very truth we are in prayer we are having the Christian experience.

1. Speaking and Hearing. Most prayer is a monologue. We speak to God, but we give him no opportunity to speak to us. It has been my privilege to ask a great number of children who were desiring to make public profession of their faith in Christ for a definition of prayer. Almost without exception their answer is, "Talking to God." It is not a bad definition. With long and complicated phrases the theologians

could not get much closer to the truth. But there is just one little word in the children's definition that I always want to change. It seems to me better to speak of prayer as "talking with God." We should gain more from prayer if we would give greater attention to listening, and not exhaust our efforts in speaking.

2. Seeing the Unseen. In prayer we are not passing pleasantries. Communion with our friends in the flesh is a deep and vital thing. How much more vital should be our communion with God! As we wait before him our mental and spiritual eyes are opened so that we can see. Only God can open our eyes that we may see. You will recall the old story of Elisha and the young man, when the prophet found the city surrounded by the forces of the enemy. There seemed to the young man no way out. In despair he came to the man of God; and the prophet prayed: "Jehovah, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And Jehovah opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha," II Kings 6:17.

3. Discovery of His Will. Through all ages God has been seeking to reveal himself and his purposes unto men. Through you and me he would make known his will for the world. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son." Heb. 1:1, 2. Religion is essentially discovery. There is not only something behind us to be learned but there is something ahead of us to be discovered. It is in prayer as communion with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that we find his way for us.

GOD THE ANSWER TO PRAYER

When in prayer we have come into communion with God we have found the answer. Children may think of their earthly fathers as men who give them things. They may think of their parents largely in terms of what can be got from them. Adults do not do so. They do not covet the things their parents can give, but they do cherish their parents. If prayer be to us only petition, then its answer must be found in the granting or the refusal to grant those petitions. This, however, is to put prayer on a very low plane. Prayer as communion seeks God and not the things God can give. God himself is the answer to every true prayer. Jesus rebuked those who followed him because they were more interested in receiving loaves and fishes than they were in companionship with him. "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled." John 6:26.

"Not Thy gifts I seek, O Lord;
Not Thy gifts, but Thee.
What were all Thy boundless store
Without Thyself, what less or more?
Not Thy gifts, but Thee."

THE POWER OF PRAYER

The deeper meaning of prayer is discovered in its power. Truly "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

1. **Those Who Pray.** Even those who deny the greater efficacy of prayer will acknowledge its psychological value to the man who prays. From our knees we rise different men and women. "We kneel, how weak! we rise, how full of power!" Far transcending the power of man over man—

and that is a tremendous power—is the power of God over man. From communion with the heavenly Father we go out ready to face triumphantly all that life holds for us, no longer relying on our own wisdom and strength, but on his.

“As torrents in summer,
Half dried in their channels,
Suddenly rise, though the
Sky is still cloudless,

For rain has been falling
Far off at their fountains;
“So hearts that are fainting
Grow full to o’erflowing,
And they that behold it
Marvel, and know not
That God at their fountains
Far off has been raining!”

2. **Others.** Prayer for others has always had a large place in the Christian faith. Intercessory prayer has ever been one of the great forces in the world. Just how our prayer raises our friends to higher levels of life, no man can say; that it does, no sane man can deny.

3. **The Kingdom of God.** Jesus taught his disciples and us to pray that his Kingdom might come. Prayer itself is a vital force in producing that Kingdom. This also is a fact, though we are not able to explain it. “The main work must be done, not by reading a book in a chair, still less by arguing in public, but by going down on your knees and letting the grace of God come into your hearts.”² Through prayer we serve ourselves, but we do much more than that. The Kingdom tarries because we have not learned to pray. Some years ago, in writing about one of the conferences on the limita-

² “The Case for Christianity,” by Clement F. Rogers, page 42. Harper & Brothers, 1928.

tion of armaments, Mark Sullivan, the veteran correspondent, said: "There is a lot of prayer being directed at the conference, and anybody who doubts that prayer can accomplish things has allowed cynicism to blind his ordinary powers of observation. To say just what is the process through which prayer brings things about would involve us in metaphysical and theological argument. But of the central truth there can be no doubt." Though we cannot see just how, yet with James we believe that "the supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working," James 5:16.

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

We pray because we cannot keep from praying. If we live on low levels we may get along without communion with God, but we cannot live life at its fullest without prayer. I can yet see the glint in the eye and hear the pathos in the voice of a great teacher under whom I once sat. This man, then an instructor in a theological seminary, was at the same time the pastor of a great and exacting church. He always came to his classes directly from the work of his parish. One day one of the callow students asked this man how a person could pray when he was confused about the meaning of prayer. With deep feeling evident in his eye and his voice the teacher replied, "Man, how can one keep from praying?"

Prayer is a duty, a solemn duty that we owe ourselves, others, and God, but before prayer is at its best it must go beyond necessity and duty and become a high privilege. Companionship with God in prayer is the highest privilege open to man. It must become our joy and chief delight. Dr. William Adams Brown gives us his reasoned conclusion: "In saying that to recover the lost sense of reality in prayer one must have done once and for all with the idea that prayer is a duty, I do not mean, of course, that prayer is not

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a duty. If by duty we understand the content of the moral ideal, the goal after which we ought to strive, the standard that defines the perfect and complete life, then prayer is the duty of duties. But the fact remains that we can realize what it means even as a duty only as we cease to think of it as a duty and appreciate it as a privilege. . . . Prayer, to be effective, must be free, the spontaneous outgoing of the personality to something without and above, which is felt to be supremely worthy."³

"THY WILL BE DONE"

The specific petition of our Lord in the Garden, that the cup might pass from him, was not answered. In the deepest sense his prayer was answered, as all true prayer is always answered. His companionship with the heavenly Father was made complete. He prayed, not in defeat or despair, but in triumph, "Not my will, but thine, be done," Luke 22:42.

The central element in our communion with God must be self-surrender. We do not come to him demanding of him that he do our will. We come to put ourselves in his hands to be used by him. We dare not try to use God as a means of obtaining that which our hearts desire. "And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." I John 5:14. In the story told by Jesus, the prodigal came to the father saying, "Give me," and the communion between the father and the son was broken; the penitent came saying, "Make me," and the communion was restored. Wendell Phillips used to say that in God's sight there are no majorities and no minorities; that one, on God's side, is a majority. By

³ "The Life of Prayer in a World of Science," pages 20, 21. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931. Used by permission.

prayer we do not get God on our side; by prayer we put ourselves on God's side.

Sabatier, the great French theologian, put it this way: "At the beginning the ambition of the pious man was to bend the divine will to his own; at the end his peace, his happiness, is to subordinate his wishes and desires to the will of the Father who knows how to be gracious, righteous, perfect!"⁴

It makes a difference what men believe and how they think. We should never cease our striving to understand better the meaning of prayer. Throughout our lives we should constantly be formulating a philosophy of prayer, and we should welcome every contribution that devout men—men of science as well as of religion—can make to our understanding. But even while we are trying to understand the meaning of prayer we should continue to practice this "highest creative function of personality."

QUESTIONS

1. What is the chief cause of our failure to pray? How large a place do intellectual difficulties have?

2. Have the discoveries of science altered our ideas of prayer? In what ways?

3. Make a list of some of the world's great thinkers who have been men of prayer.

4. A group of women were attending a missionary meeting in the country when rain began to threaten. The driver of the car urged the other women to hurry that they might get to the pavement before the storm broke. One of the women said: "Oh, let's don't do that. Let's go inside and pray that it won't rain." What would you say to this?

5. Does it make any difference to God whether or not we pray?

⁴ "Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion," by Auguste Sabatier, page 113. George H. Doran Company.

6. What would be your own definition of prayer?

7. Do you believe that religion is something in front of us to be discovered as well as something behind to be learned? Have we, as religious people, turned our thought too much to the past?

8. A leader said recently that when we pray we should expect an answer in just as explicit terms as that which would be contained in a telegram. Does this indicate an adequate conception of prayer?

9. In what ways have you known or observed the power of prayer?

10. Are people praying as much to-day as in times past?

11. How can we help ourselves to make prayer a privilege? Is the only way first to accept it as a duty?

12. Can we really pray without self-surrender?

CHAPTER IX

PRAYER—ITS PRACTICE

Scripture References: Mark 1:12, 13, 35-39; 6:30-43; 14:32-42; Luke 18:1-8; Gal. 1:11-17; I Thess. 5:12-17.

Taking it for granted that we realize the importance of prayer, and understand enough of the meaning of prayer to enable us to pray intelligently, how shall we so practice prayer that it will become in our lives a vital Christian experience? It is no small victory really to want to pray. Dr. Brown thinks that it is one of our primary problems, and that when it is successfully met the battle is half won. "It is not simply that it is hard to pray. It is hard to *want* to pray. And unless we can recover that lost desire, we shall make little headway against the difficulties of the mind."¹ Assuming that we do want to pray, how shall we pray?

JESUS AND PRAYER

Instinctively we should turn to the Master to learn of him. He alone kept constant that communion with the heavenly Father which is the objective sought in Christian prayer. What can we find concerning his method?

1. **His Practice.** Time and again it is recorded that our Lord went apart to pray. The pressure upon him was terrific. He did not, on occasions, have time to eat, Mark 6:31, but he always had time to pray, ch. 1:35. Nothing else was allowed to crowd out of his life his times of quiet communion

¹ "The Life of Prayer in a World of Science," by William Adams Brown, page 34. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931. Used by permission.

with the Father. Through every hour of every day he was fully conscious of the Father's presence in his life. He and the Father were one, one in purpose and in action, yet Jesus seemed to feel the necessity of turning aside from the crushing duties and responsibilities of life for seasons of deeper fellowship.

2. His Teaching. Jesus gave us the example of his own turning to God, but just how we are to come in prayer he did not say. Nor do any other of the sacred writers discuss this important matter. Jesus seemed to say to those disciples who came to him to learn to pray that the way to learn was to pray. He gave them a model prayer, but he gave them no instructions in the method of prayer. Perhaps we are given overmuch not only to philosophizing about the meaning of prayer but to philosophizing about the practice of prayer as well.

It matters not in what way we come to God. If we seek him with hearts intent on finding him, we shall never find ourselves disappointed. He is not concerned about our choice of words or attitude of body. Such things can be made of help to us, but they are not essential in finding God, and we should never allow ourselves to forget that in prayer we are primarily seeking fellowship with God.

A man who was away from home received, in the same mail, three letters. One was carefully written, grammatically correct, and in excellent English. The second was written in a childish scrawl; words were misspelled; the grammar was atrocious. The third consisted only of marks—marks made by a baby's hand. Yet all three letters brought to the man the same message of love and tenderness. The mother and the child and the baby, each in a different way, spoke to his heart.

God is not concerned about the manner in which we approach him. Jesus seems to teach quite plainly that the way to learn to pray is to pray.

PRAYING AND SAYING PRAYERS

The saying of prayers is not praying, though the saying of prayers can oftentimes be made to lead to prayer. To rattle off certain words and phrases, as if thereby we were accomplishing something, is but to delude ourselves. We might as well use a prayer wheel.

Bedtime came in a home where there were two little girls. They went to their room alone to prepare for bed. When, sometime later, their mother came in to be with them while they prayed—how often we say to children that we have come to hear them say their prayers!—she found one of the little ones asleep. The other, seeing that her sister was asleep, said in all seriousness to the mother: "Don't waken her, mother. I'll just say her prayers for her to-night."

How typical this is of the thought of many who are no longer children, physically speaking at least! The practice of prayer must be a far deeper matter than the saying of prayers.

PRIVATE PRAYER AS AN ACT

Just now we are confining our thought to private prayer, since public prayer will be considered later on when we discuss public worship. Prayer is an act, the act of seeking fellowship with the Divine. I should speak of it as a rite, did not that word carry to so many a connotation of sterility. Let us try to discover some ways in which we can make the act of private prayer more effective.

1. Solitude. Jesus seems quite explicit in his insistence upon solitude. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into

thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee." Matt. 6:6. It is hard for us to hear the voice of God while the clamor of the world is in our ears. Solitude is not always easily obtained. We must learn to shut the doors of our hearts and minds even while the din of life impinges on our ears. "A solitude is the audience chamber of God." This chamber we must enter physically or spiritually, thus shutting out the world that God may be heard. Dr. Robert Russell Wicks tells of a poor woman in a tenement who used to say, "I throw my apron over my head when I want solitude; it is all that I can get."²

When the full significance of his life was opening out before him and he was considering its implications, Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, Mark 1:12. When his life on earth was drawing swiftly to its close, and the shadow of the cross lay athwart him, Jesus, having come with the disciples into the Garden of Gethsemane, said to them: "Sit ye here, while I pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly amazed, and sore troubled. And he saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death: abide ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed," ch. 14:32-35. First our Lord left behind the larger group of the disciples, then the smaller group of those who understood him best, that alone he might seek strength for what lay ahead.

After Paul's vision on the Damascus road, and before he went forth on his great work for Christ, he sought solitude. "Straightway I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me: but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned unto

² "The Reason for Living," page 227. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934.

Damascus." Gal. 1:16, 17. God is in the rush of life just as fully as he is in solitude, but we are so constituted that to realize his presence we need the solitude.

2. Preparation. We should not expect to rush carelessly into the presence of the great of the earth. Were we to be granted audience with one of them we should prepare ourselves most carefully for that opportunity. Why, then, will we turn so thoughtlessly to God?

Some of the greatest men of prayer of the centuries have made much of the matter of preparation for prayer. They have suggestions to offer us which should be of help. For instance, Ignatius de Loyola, as a preparation for prayer, was wont to reconstruct very carefully a Bible scene. Into this reconstruction he put, by imagination, the use of all five senses. He endeavored to hear, to see, to smell, to touch, and to taste the significance of the scene he was pondering. This may seem to us far-fetched, but certainly there should be careful preparation of our spirits before we approach the infinite Spirit. Nothing is more helpful here than the right use of Scripture.

3. Times and Places. No one could maintain that times and places are necessary to communion, but they can be made most helpful. True enough, we need go to no definite place to find God; we need do no special thing to find him. Yet it is much easier for us if at certain times and in certain places we have been wont to realize his presence. The times and places have no effect upon God, but they do have upon us. Here, as in other matters, we who are Protestants must be on our guard lest we fail to employ that which is useful because of that which can only be termed a Protestant prejudice. We should put by some hour of every day—if at all possible some specific hour—for holy things. We shall more

quickly attain communion if that hour is spent in some place where prayer is wont to be offered by us.

4. **Concentration.** How our minds do wander! Psychologists tell us that the best of us can keep his mind fixed on one subject only a humiliatingly short time. It is desperately hard to keep our attention fixed on God even while we are in the act of prayer. Many of us can say with the ancient mariner,

“I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust’.”

Our minds wander during prayer not only to the evil but to the trivial. We are all at times like Christopher Robin, in A. A. Milne's child poem. Christopher Robin knelt at the foot of his bed and began to pray, but his child mind wandered off to the interesting and amusing incidents of the day, to the fun he had had in his bath, to the difference between the hood on his own dressing gown and on that of Nanny. He could not keep his mind on the task which he had undertaken. How difficult, yes, how impossible, we find it to keep our thoughts centered on the matter in hand! Much of our prayer is fruitless for this very reason. While we assume the attitude of prayer our minds are attending to other, and lesser, matters.

5. **Expectancy.** We should always be in an expectant mood when we pray. Expectancy is but another word for faith. We should not expect our petitions to be granted in some marvelous and mysterious way, but we should expect to find God and so to have our lives purified and strengthened. Too often when we pray we expect nothing to happen; when we expect results we are seldom disappointed. We

must claim the promise that if we seek we shall find, if we knock it shall be opened to us. God will make his presence and his love known to us, if we will but allow him.

6. Persistence. We are so soon discouraged! We do not find on our first attempt a satisfying communion and so we give up. Those who have been the saints of the Church have known long seasons of barrenness, times when their prayers seemed as useless words, yet they persisted, until finally they won that communion which transformed their lives. Jacob wrestled all night with the angel, and would not give up until a blessing was vouchsafed to him. Gen. 32:24. We need not wrestle with God, but we do sorely need to wrestle with ourselves.

Jesus gave a parable which has been variously interpreted. The story is of the unjust judge who finally succumbed to the entreaties of the importunate widow and granted her request. Luke 18:1-8. We are not wise in trying to make parables go on all fours. They are employed for a specific purpose. Luke tells us plainly what this story is for: "And he spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint," v. 1.

We must not lose sight of the fact that just as a vital Christian experience is an art, and as much must be learned and constantly practiced, so is prayer an art. Only by persistence in it can we hope to attain proficiency.

7. Self-Surrender. Self-surrender is both the root and the fruit of prayer. It must be in the spirit of self-surrender that we come to pray. As we find God in prayer we shall consummate that self-surrender until his will shall become our will. Only in his will is our peace. It was the publican who came crying, "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner," who "went down to his house justified," rather than the proud Pharisee.

God Almighty can do little with a man who is satisfied with himself. Pride, as well as a love of money, is "a root of all kinds of evil." The fullest self-surrender is the result of prayer, but to make our prayer effective a desire for it must be in our hearts.

Prayer to God as an act of the Christian soul requires the best that is within us. It can be made the most rewarding of all the exercises of which we are capable. It is worth a thousand times any effort it may cost.

PRAYER AS AN ATTITUDE

Prayer is both an act and an attitude. When Paul said in his letter to the Thessalonians, "Pray without ceasing," I Thess. 5:17, he was obviously thinking of prayer as an attitude. As the words of the familiar hymn have it:

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast."

In one sense our lives should be marked by constant communion with God; we should always be in the attitude of prayer, no matter what our employment may be. Horace Bushnell said, "I fell into the habit of talking with God on every occasion." Brother Lawrence prayed as devoutly among his pots and kettles as he did when in the sanctuary. Prayer had passed over from an act and had become an attitude. So should we strive that it may be for us not only an act but an attitude. Of this I think we can rest assured, that prayer shall never become for us an attitude until first it has become a vital life-giving act.

"LORD, TEACH US"

We shall learn to pray only as we have in us that mind "which was also in Christ Jesus," Phil. 2:5. He only can teach us to pray.

"O Thou by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way,
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach us how to pray."

We need to be taught. There is no other who is able to teach us. Men may give us the benefit of their experience. They may tell us what methods they have employed to make prayer a vital experience. All this is helpful, but, in the final analysis, we must learn at the feet of the great Teacher of us all.

Tertullian, the sternest of the early theologians, said, "Wherever the soul comes to itself, as out of a surfeit, or a sleep or a sickness, and attains something of its natural soundness, it speaks of God." If our souls are not crying out for him, if he is not our chief desire, it is because our souls are unsound. Souls which are sound "cry out for the living God." In prayer we find him.

"BE STILL, AND KNOW"

To "be still, and know" that He is God is the first principle of Christian prayer. All we need to do is to give God a chance to be heard. He will not force himself upon us. The Master stands at the door and knocks. You will recall Holman Hunt's picture, *Light of the World*. There is no latch on the outside. The door can be opened only from within. If we will but lift the latch, he will come in unto us. If we will but be still, quiet enough to hear God speak

to us, he will make himself plain, and ours will be a sweet communion with him. It has been suggested that if we give sixteen hours a day to things physical and five minutes a day to things spiritual, we should not be surprised that things physical are two hundred times as real and important to us as are things spiritual.

As we learn to pray by praying we shall not only perfect our practice but we shall also learn more fully the meaning of prayer. The life of prayer must never be divorced from the life of action. "We are responsible," says Mrs. Emma Herman, "not only for our prayers, but for providing the background against which prayer can energize. It is not too much, indeed, to say that for every thought we give to prayer itself—except, of course, the actual practice of prayer, which is vital at every stage—we should give ten to the life behind the prayer."⁸

Through prayer we enter most directly into the vital Christian experience. In fact, in prayer we are already enjoying that fellowship with God in Christ which is the vital Christian experience.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you want to pray? If not, analyze the reasons why. Is your desire for prayer increasing or decreasing?
2. Do you have the capacity for prayer which the fathers had? If not, why?
3. Search out all Scripture references to Jesus at prayer, and to his teaching regarding prayer.
4. What values were there in the insistence which used to be made, especially in meetings of young people, upon audible prayer?

⁸ "Creative Prayer," page 23. Harper & Brothers, 1925.

5. In what ways can the saying of prayers be made to lead to prayer?

6. How can you obtain solitude for prayer? If physical surroundings make it impossible for you to be apart from others, what can you do?

7. What methods of preparation for prayer have you found helpful? What methods have others you know found helpful?

8. In your judgment are times and places of private prayer important? What are some of the dangers and drawbacks in such?

9. Suggest ways and means of training yourself in concentration.

10. Should we expect to find God every time we pray? What other items than those suggested can you offer that should be helpful in making prayer as an act effective?

11. Which is the more important, prayer as an act or prayer as an attitude? What is the relation between them?

12. How can you be still, in order that you may know God?

CHAPTER X

MYSTICISM

Scripture References: Gen. 28:10-17; I Sam 3:1-14; Jer., ch. 1; Ezek. 1:26 to 2:7; John 12:20-36; II Cor. 12:1-10; Rev. 1:9-11.

Mysticism is one of those words which must be used because no other is available. To many minds it carries a most unfortunate connotation. It is associated with abnormalities; it seems synonymous with "mysteries"; it smacks of the occult. The word is invested with widely varying meanings, and is so differently used that so careful a scholar as Professor James Moffatt expressed himself as longing "to see 'mysticism' banished from the vocabulary for a generation, in the interests of clear thinking."¹ Yet this much abused and frequently misunderstood word stands for a reality in the religious life. We use it for want of a better word.

Definition. One dictionary carries this definition: "The doctrine and belief that man may attain through contemplation and love to an immediate consciousness or knowledge of God." If we turn to Professor Rufus Jones, who is an outstanding American interpreter of mysticism, we find this as his definition: "That type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the divine Presence." It is the possibility and importance of this type of religion which we are stressing throughout this entire course.

Beyond the Senses. The mystic employs his senses in leading him into the mystic experience, but his companionship

¹ "Religion in Life," Vol. IV, No. 4, page 617. The Abingdon Press.

with God is not the result of the work of the senses; nor is God's will and way made known to him through the senses. His experience far transcends, and cannot be described in terms of, the sensory.

Beyond the Powers of Mind. The mystic arrives by way of intuition and not as the result of his reason. He is quick to deny that there is anything irrational in his experience, but he not only admits but insists that it is nonrational. God is not found by ratiocination. He is known by immediate consciousness, irrespective of all of the powers of intellect. This is not to deny the value of the reason, but only to say it is not supreme. It is also true that "a mysticism which lacks intellectual virility will sooner or later be smitten with spiritual impotence."

Revival of Interest. There has been, since the World War, a revival of interest in mysticism in religion. By some this is deplored as a weakening influence and by others welcomed as a return to the depths from which all true religion must spring. Religion has always had its mystics, and must have. Edward Caird did not express it too strongly when he said, "Mysticism is religion in its most concentrated and exclusive form." It is interesting to have the judgment of the contemporary man of science, Dr. Alexis Carrel. "Christian mysticism," says Dr. Carrel, in his book "Man, the Unknown," "constitutes the highest form of religious activity," and again: "Mysticism is splendidly generous. It brings to man the fulfillment of his highest desires, inner strength, spiritual light, divine love, ineffable peace. Religious intuition is as real as æsthetic inspiration. Through the contemplation of superhuman beauty, mystics and poets may reach the ultimate truth."²

² Pages 135, 136, 137. Harper & Brothers, 1935.

The Scripture references in this chapter are used similarly to those in the chapter on "Devotional Literature," as examples rather than as the basis for thought. Several incidents, selected at random from the Bible, in which the mystic element dominates are suggested.

MYSTICISM AND PRAYER

It is not easy, if indeed it is possible, to differentiate mysticism and prayer. Certainly prayer is an experience transcending the senses and the powers of the intellect. It may be just as well not to try to draw a line between the two. What has already been said in regard to prayer will be applicable here. Mysticism is prayer at its highest and best. It is an entering into the inner chamber of the soul, where not only is the world shut out but the idols our minds have created are left behind, that we may enjoy the blessedness of communion with the Infinite.

ONE WAY TO GOD

Mysticism offers one way to God. It is not the only way, and the mystic is not justified in insisting that all must see with the inner eye as he does. It is a way as old as man.

1. Pagan Mysticism. There is a pagan mysticism, both ancient and contemporary. The Christian is not the only one who has sought God directly, nor is he the only one who claims to have found him. Other religions, especially those of India, have made much of intuition. Nor are we at all interested in trying to deny the reality of their experiences.

2. Christian Mysticism. From the very first, mysticism has had a central place in the Christian religion. More powerful in its influence, more practical in its fruitage than pagan mysticism, focusing as it does in God revealed in Jesus Christ, it can never die out.

3. Finding God Within. Mysticism has been defined as "the art of finding God in one's own self." Surely this is one of the primary tenets of the Christian faith, that God is within the soul of every man. If man is really to find God, it must be within. "You need not go to heaven to see God," says St. Theresa, one of the greatest of the mystics. "Nor need you speak loud, as if he were far away. Nor need you cry for wings like a dove so as to fly to him. Settle yourself in solitude, and you will come upon God in yourself. And then entreat him as your Father and relate to him your troubles. Those who can in this manner shut themselves up in the little heaven of their own hearts, where He dwells who made heaven and earth, let them be sure that they walk in the most excellent way."

A WAY AVAILABLE FOR ALL

We are prone to look either longingly or patronizingly toward the mystic. Whether we see him as a saint or as a poor self-deluded, "fever-infected maker of mirages," we think of him as a man apart. We may envy him his experiences and his certainty, but we are convinced that we of common clay can have no part with him. In this we are unfair both to him and to ourselves. To be sure the great mystics were geniuses; they were artists in eternal life, and, as are all geniuses, were inclined to be abnormal. The abnormalities of the mystics, however, are due to the accident of their psychological constitutions and are not the result of their mystical experiences.

All of us have the ability to be mystics, and this ability it is incumbent upon us to develop. Not that we can ever take our places with the great mystics any more than we can with the great artists and musicians, but our experiences can be similar to theirs. "In conclusion it may be asserted with

confidence," writes Dr. Charles Morris Addison, "that the mystic, when stripped of all the nonessentials of his mysticism, of all the trappings and prejudices which have so long confused us, is not a man endowed with a peculiar spiritual faculty denied to most of us, but is a man like ourselves, with a yearning for God, like ours, only more intense, pursuing his end, an end open to us, by the patient use of means within the reach of any of us."³ Careful students seem to agree that in some measure all of us have a capacity for mysticism. "The mystical sense," says Principal Jacks, "is so far from being a rare endowment, or an abnormality which we may hesitate whether we should class as pathological, that it is, in one or other of its forms, almost universal."⁴ We should keep this constantly in mind. We are not indulging in an academic study of mysticism, but endeavoring to see what in the mystic's life and way may help each one of us toward a vital Christian experience.

STEPS IN THE WAY

Some types of mysticism have evolved most elaborate techniques. The disciplines insisted upon by the yoga and the Zen Buddhists are most exacting and exhaustive. Provision is made for the subjugation of both mind and matter that the desired communion may be attained. Some Christian mystics have developed similar techniques for themselves—and some have insisted upon them for others. For instance, St. Ignatius required of those who would take his "spiritual exercises" thirty days of unbroken concentration. For most of us, even if we were willing to perfect ourselves in his technique, such exercises are obviously impossible. There

³ "What Is Mysticism?" page 51. The Macmillan Company, 1923.

⁴ "A Living Universe," by L. P. Jacks, page 17. George H. Doran Company, 1924. Out of print.

are, however, three steps in the mystics' way which we may well take.

1. **Longing.** There must be first of all a heartfelt longing, not for the things that God can give, but for God himself. The mystic understands the psalmist when that singer of songs cries,

"O God, thou art my God; earnestly will I seek thee:
My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee,
In a dry and weary land, where no water is."

Ps. 63:1.

Again the mystic can say with the psalmist,

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
So panteth my soul after thee, O God."

Ps. 42:1.

This longing of the heart for God must not be denied. The trouble with too many of us is that we do not realize the root of our restlessness; we are unable to analyze our need. A little girl was away from home and mother for the first time. She was finding it a distressing experience, though she did not realize just why she was so miserable. After sitting for some time in a pensive mood, her face was lighted up with a smile of comprehension. She turned to her companion and said: "I know what's the matter with me. I want my mamma." We have come a long way when we realize that our need is for God, and when we set ourselves, not to stifling the cry of our hearts, but to satisfying the need. Only so shall we enter into the more abundant life. Robert Browning was a mystic, as are all truly great poets. In one of his earliest poems he says,

"I have always had one lode-star; now
As I look back, I see that I have halted
Or hastened as I looked toward that star—
A need, a trust, a yearning after God."

So it was that Gilbert K. Chesterton could write, "His [Browning's] intellect went upon bewildering voyages, but his soul walked in a straight road."

2. Repentance. The longing for God soon leads to repentance. The human heart must be purged of all sin. Only the pure in heart can see God. The evil thoughts and imaginations which cloud our vision must be done away. Sometimes the mystics have employed excessive means to purge themselves. Some of them came to believe that the various austerities they practiced were not essential. Even so, they put us to shame. We confine repentance too often to the repetition of words asking for forgiveness, when it should be a terribly real and far-reaching experience. We may wear crosses of precious metals studded with stones. Heinrich Suso with a stylus cut into the flesh over his heart the word "Jesu." Certainly there is no merit in that act; but there is merit in the attitude of repentance which led to that act.

It is not a light thing to ask God's forgiveness. If one thinks it a small matter, let him look again at Calvary and that cross without the city's wall, that made forgiveness possible. True repentance is not easy; certainly it is not morbid. It is a most salutary and necessary step.

3. Contemplation. The mystic wins his way through longing and repentance to contemplation. "The true union," said Meister Eckart, the German mystic, "between God and the soul takes place in the little spark which is called the spirit of the soul."

All along the way the mystic makes large use of silence. We have already hinted at its importance. The mystic insists upon it.

"Ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of eternity."

But most of us are not silent enough to hear the sound. Rare, indeed, is it to find a soul quiet enough to hear God speak!

As the mystic sits in contemplation he is not wasting time. He has learned the important lesson that time out of the game of life is not time lost. The game can be carried on successfully only as time is taken out, to use an illustration from the gridiron. In contemplation the mystic places himself in a receptive mood, that the infinite Spirit may break through and he, the child of the temporal, may be fused with the Eternal. The psalmist knew the power of contemplation:

"My heart was hot within me;
While I was musing the fire burned."
Ps. 39:3.

4. Consummation. It is one of the weaknesses of much mysticism that the mystic cannot put into words that which he has experienced. Perhaps we have no right to expect that the experience shall be defined. Certainly we should be satisfied if, as occurs in true Christian mysticism, the fruit of the experience is evident in the life of the mystic.

One classical illustration of the report of the mystic is that of the conversation between St. Catherine of Genoa and her children. In her moments of ecstasy she would cry, "O would I could tell what my heart feels!" And her children would say, "O mother, tell us something of it!" And she would answer: "I cannot find words appropriate to so great a love. But this I can say with truth: that if of what my

heart feels, one drop were to fall into hell, hell itself would altogether turn into eternal life."

James Russell Lowell tells us of his experience: "As I was speaking the whole system rose up before me like a vague destiny, looming from the Abyss. I never before so clearly felt the Spirit of God in me and around me. The whole room seemed to be full of God. The air seemed to waver to and fro with the presence of something, I knew not what. I spoke with the calmness and clearness of a prophet. I cannot tell you what this revelation was. I have not studied it enough. But I shall perfect it one day and then you shall hear it and acknowledge its grandeur."

One more testimony is that of a contemporary, Margaret Prescott Montague: "Out of all the gray days of my life I have looked into the heart of reality."

However they try to interpret their experiences, the mystics all agree that they have found God. They testify that for them life has become luminous. They are conscious of "the light that never was, on sea or land."

ECSTATIC EXPERIENCES

Many of the mystics testify to their ecstatic experiences. Few, if any of them, consider these experiences as the center of their communion. Some definitely discount ecstasy. Paul, who was a great mystic indeed, did not hold in high esteem certain ecstasies in which the early Christians were inclined to indulge. He knew the experience but he saw the dangers in it. "I thank God, I speak with tongues more than you all: howbeit in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." I Cor. 14:18, 19.

To people of a given psychological constitution ecstatic experiences come as a by-product of mysticism. They are not an essential or integral part of communion with God.

ASCETICISM

In our thinking asceticism and mysticism are closely associated. Here again it is true that many of the mystics have practiced the severest of ascetism. That is, they have mortified the flesh in the most rigorous manner, as if there were virtue in self-denial as an end. Like Paul, they have brought their bodies into subjection: "But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage," I Cor. 9:27. In this matter they have gone to the most dangerous and sometimes revolting extremes. Here, too, it can only be said that the ascetic practice in its radical manifestations is not an essential or integral part of Christian mysticism.

A PRACTICAL POWER

One of the chief charges to be made against mysticism is that it incapacitates men for life. The one who so speaks is simply not conversant with the part that the mystics have played in the progress of the world. The typical Christian mystics are not St. Anthony in the desert or St. Simeon Stylites on his pillar. The typical mystics are Paul, turning the world upside down wherever he did not find it love side up; St. Francis of Assisi, one of the greatest powers for good in the Middle Ages; and those countless others whose mysticism was sane and sound and who went about the world doing good.

We should look askance on any religious practice which does not bear fruitage in Christlike character. Judged by the old standard of its fruitage, Christian mysticism needs have no fear.

Mysticism stands for a reality in the Christian life—a reality which, in large measure or small, all of us can achieve.

QUESTIONS

1. Suggest incidents in the Bible, other than those given in the Scripture references, in which the mystical dominates.
2. In what ways is a revival of interest in mysticism evident?
3. Can God ever be found through the senses and the intellect?
4. What other ways to God are there besides the way offered in mysticism?
5. Study the techniques of mysticism which other religions have to offer.
6. What mystical experiences have you yourself had? What experiences have your friends had?
7. What place, if any, do ecstatic experiences have in the Christian religion?
8. What is the value of asceticism and what are its dangers?
9. List more of the great mystics who have been men of power.
10. Is it true that most of the world's reformers were mystics?
11. Are we right in insisting that all religious practice must be judged by its fruit?
12. Can there be a religion without the element of mysticism?

CHAPTER XI

PERSONAL CONTACTS AND GROUP FELLOWSHIP

Scripture References: I Sam. 19:20; Mark 3:7-19; 9:2-8; Luke 22:39-46; 24:13-43; Acts 2:1-4, 40-42; I John 2:7-11; 4:16-21.

Through contact with our fellows and through the stimulus to be found in groups we may move toward a vital Christian experience.

PERSONAL CONTACTS

A wise British preacher has stated that the most helpful thing to be said to people who in the matter of religion are honestly seeking is, "Get into touch with some of the people whom the real Jesus has set on fire, and because through them you will in a measure get to know Christ, you will also find God."¹ This is sound advice. Our personal contacts should bring us into closer communion with God.

A Test of Love. All the way through the New Testament love to God and love to man go hand in hand. Neither is complete without the other. This is strong language: "He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him," I John 2:9, 10; and this: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his

¹ "Finding God," by A. Herbert Gray, page 91. Harper & Brothers, 1931. Used by permission.

brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen," I John 4:20. Such words are simple and plain; they need no elucidation.

The Unanswerable Argument. There is only one unanswerable argument for the presence of Christ in the world and that is a Christian man. Stanley said he knew there was a Christ because he knew David Livingstone. The souls who know the Christ, who in their lives exemplify his Spirit, are, consciously or unconsciously, preaching sermons more powerful than those heard in any pulpit. When William James was asked for a definition of spirituality, he pointed to Phillips Brooks.

"Come, let us preach to-day," said St. Francis of Assisi to his monks. Down through the city they went together, walking and talking, and returned to the monastery. One of the monks said, "When do we begin to preach?" St. Francis replied, "My son, we have been preaching; we have been seen—it is no use walking anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk." It is the same message that Paul gave to the Corinthian Christians: "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men," II Cor. 3:2.

Through Man to God. Just as in the first instance most of us were brought to Christ through some person, so we can keep our fellowship with God on a higher plane by making the right use of our contacts with other people. Dr. Rufus Jones, who as we have already said is one of the foremost American interpreters of mysticism, has this to say: "What counts most is the fellowship and influence of spiritually contagious persons who, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, unconsciously transmit that life."² As we are in contact with such people, our hearts burn within us

² "The Testimony of the Soul," page 30. The Macmillan Company, 1936. Used by permission.

as the hearts of the disciples did as they went with our Lord to Emmaus, Luke 24:32.

1. *The Home.* Just because the contacts in the home are so much more immediate and so much more sacred, it is here that there is the greatest influence of one person over the other. Here that mysterious power of personality over personality is most evident. "God setteth the solitary in families." Ps. 68:6. We all carry with us to our graves the marks of our homes. Jesus' home must have been very beautiful and devout, else he would never have taught us to call the infinite God our heavenly Father. The association of one with another in the confines of the home should lead all into a fresh knowledge and love of God.

a. *Husband and Wife.* It is fine to see God revealed in nature, in art, in music. It is far better to see him revealed in those we love. The marriage relation should bring to those concerned a better understanding, not only of themselves and of life, but of God. There is a beautiful story of Baron Bunsen, that as he lay dying he looked up into the face of his wife as she bowed over him and said to her, "In thy face I have seen the face of the Eternal." After quoting Carlyle's exquisite tribute to his wife, "She was the rainbow to my poor dripping day," Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin goes on to say, "To believing folk in every age, God, of whose goodness wives are a supreme sacrament, has been just that—the rainbow to their poor dripping day."³

How far short we who are husbands and wives fall in making our relationship contribute to our mutual achievement of fellowship with the God who has set us in families!

b. *Parents.* Most of us as children—at least those of us who had devout parents, and probably few others are read-

³ "God's Turn," page 47. Harper & Brothers, 1934.

ing this—thought of God as an infinite Being very much like our own fathers. When parents consider that their children, whether the parents would have it is so or not, do learn of God through them, they should be brought up standing. The words of Amiel cannot be quoted too frequently: "The religion of a child depends on what its mother and its father are, and not on what they say. The inner and unconscious ideal which guides their life is precisely what touches the child; their words, their remonstrances, their punishments, their bursts of feeling even, are for him mere thunder and comedy; what they worship, that it is which his instinct divines and reflects."

c. *Children.* Sometimes children teach their parents more than parents teach their children. Certainly parents are led into closer fellowship with the heavenly Father by the influence of the lives God has intrusted to them. Once when baptizing his colleague's child, Dr. Alexander Whyte said to the father, "He'll teach you more, sir, than any of your college professors did." Certainly the child teaches the parent more about God than does any professor.

In his "Trail of Life in the Middle Years," Dr. Rufus Jones says: "During this period of intellectual preparation, I had the constant companionship of my own little boy, Lowell, to whom I had to be both father and mother. I know how easy it is to hallow the memory of a child after he is gone and to see him under the dominion of a glowing imagination. It is quite possible that I fell into that well-known habit and glorified that little Julius of mine who walked beside me 'with unequal steps.' . . . It matters little now whether he was what I saw in him, or whether I throw about him a halo of my own creating. The important point is that he taught me more about life than any one of my philosophers did and he carried me farther into the heart of

things than anyone else did at that period of life. I learned through him the immortality of love. He loved me with a pure and exalted love that always seemed to me to be washed clean of all utilitarian expectation. And I loved him as a being in whom I saw the love of God revealed to me." ⁴

The Christian home should be a sanctuary where not only do all find a human companionship that is without compare, but where the contacts lead all closer to God.

2. Friendship. One of the most beautiful and helpful contacts in life is that of friendship. Such friendships as that of David and Jonathan, I Sam, chs. 19; 20, are an inspiration to all who read. It is recorded that Jesus "appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach," Mark 3:14. The primary purpose of that appointment was unquestionably the preparation of the disciples. But I like to think that Jesus also for his own sake wanted friends who would be close to him.

When asked the secret of his radiant and useful life, Charles Kingsley is reported to have said, "I had a friend." Many a man who has attained to the divine companionship could make a similar statement.

We must bear in mind that friendship is not always a power for good. It may be quite the contrary. Friendship to be fruitful in spiritual values must move on a high plane. We must love and cherish our friends for no utilitarian purposes whatsoever, not even that of attaining high spiritual values. We must always treat people as if they were ends in themselves.

It is said that a certain Harvard professor once went to see Phillips Brooks to consult him about a problem which had thrown all his thought about religion into confusion. When he came away, some one asked him what answer to

⁴ Pages 10, 11. The Macmillan Company, 1934. Used by permission.

his problem he had received. He said he had not got any specific answer, but he added: "I did not care. I found out that what I needed was not the solution of a specific problem, but the contagion of a triumphant spirit."⁵

Love is the greatest thing in the world. Next in power to the love of God for man and man for God is the love of man for man. This love can lead us into the divine love.

In one of her essays, entitled "Out of the Shadow," Michael Fairless tells of a drunkard and ne'er-do-well who was accosted one day by a little child. With a blow and a curse Gawdine shook the little fellow off. The child was trotting dismally away, when he suddenly turned, ran back, and held up a dirty face for a kiss. Gawdine was transformed. When years later he passed away this was suggested for his epitaph: "He saw the face of a little child and looked on God."⁶

Human contacts may be made a valuable aid toward a vital Christian experience.

GROUP FELLOWSHIP

In the days of his flesh Jesus spent himself primarily neither in addressing large multitudes nor in work with individuals, but rather in close contact with a small group. He trained the Twelve. It seemed to be his purpose to imbue them with his spirit. Because they were men of deeper understanding, Peter and James and John came out of the larger group into the inner circle. He took them with him to the Mount of Transfiguration, Mark 9:2-8; with him they went into the Garden, Luke 22:39-46. "The true record of the mind of Jesus in the apostolic group," writes Dr. Gaius Glenn

⁵ "When Christ Passes By," by Walter Russell Bowie, pages 36, 37. Harper & Brothers, 1933.

⁶ "The Road Mender," pages 72-74. E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1929.

Atkins, "is not what they presently made of him, but what he made of them." ⁷

There seems little doubt that we are failing to utilize as we should the values of group fellowship in finding God. There must always be made due place for differences in temperament. Some seem able to realize God most completely when in isolation from all human contacts; others, while they are in close association with fellow seekers. To-day the most significant contribution to this subject is being made by the Oxford Group Movement. Dr. Walter Marshall Horton gives a good estimate of the value of this contribution: Whatever we may think of the special methods and theories of the Oxford Group Movement, I think we may agree with them that the working unit of personal religion is not the individual, and none of the more massive forms of church organization, but the intimate group, sharing experience and looking together for guidance." ⁸

1. "Where Two or Three Are Gathered Together." When his earthly life was far spent Jesus said: "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," Matt. 18:19, 20. There is a power in group fellowship that draws all members closer to God. It may be used as one way toward a vital Christian experience.

"The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above."

2. One Man Is No Man. Of course, no man can stand by himself. Apart from surrounding society, we are not fully

⁷ "The Making of the Christian Mind," page 44. Harper & Brothers, 1928.

⁸ "Realistic Theology," pages 172, 173. Harper & Brothers, 1934.

men. Religion is more than "the flight of the alone to the Alone." Christianity is concerned with God and me—and my fellows. Even the spiritual glow which can come only from God cannot burst into a flame without contact with others. It is well-nigh impossible to kindle a fire with one stick, and still more difficult to keep such a fire burning. We sorely need, even in this highest of all activities—the soul's search for God—the contact with others.

3. Power of the Group. It is held by some that even mysticism flourishes best in the group. The Friends have much to teach us here. It is as they wait silently before God, not in isolation but as a group, that they find the most satisfying manifestation of his presence. The resurrected Christ appeared to a few individuals, but he appeared also to the group of devout followers gathered in Jerusalem: "And as they spake these things, he himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you," Luke 24:36. At Pentecost, as they were gathered together in one place, the Spirit of God moved their hearts. Acts 2: 1, 2. Not a little of the power of the Early Church, power in keeping firm hold on the reality of God, was due to the fact that "they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers," Acts 2:42.

4. Inherent Dangers. We must keep our eyes open to the grave dangers which are inherent in group fellowship. Like all power for good, it is easily converted into a power for evil.

a. Leveling Down. Groups level down as well as up. Rather than heightening our powers of spiritual perception, the group may dull these powers. Instead of pulling the lower up to the plane of the higher, the process may easily be reversed. "When more than twelve persons are gathered together," says Hugh Walpole, "there is seldom sense talked.

Twelve persons become one person obeying the lowest denominator." ⁹ Here is a real danger.

b. *Loss of Personality.* Mob psychology, whether it be in a small company or a large, is a dangerous thing. When men touch men there is a new entity which cannot always be determined in advance. Thus Dr. George T. W. Patrick warns us: "The properties of common salt, for instance, could never be deduced from the properties of sodium and chlorine, the elements of which it is composed. From the latter, we should infer that salt would be a corrosive poison rather than an agreeable seasoning for food. . . . You may know a man and his whole life history, but you cannot tell how he will behave in a crowd. A and B integrated are not A and B added." ¹⁰ Those who are suggestible may easily mistake the contagion of the crowd for the Spirit of God. Mob psychology can do its devastating work in a very small group at times. Our own personalities must be preserved at all costs.

c. *Pooled Ignorance Not Wisdom.* We cannot pool our spiritual ignorance and call it wisdom. In and through the group the Holy Spirit can work on the hearts and minds of men, but only if the group itself makes it possible.

d. *Danger in Discussion.* There is always a tendency to substitute discussion for action. The warning of Carlyle should be taken to heart: "It is a sad but sure truth that every time you speak of a fine purpose, especially if with eloquence and to the admiration of bystanders, there is less chance of your ever making a fact of it in your poor life." Discussion has its place, but if groups discuss only they serve no good purpose.

⁹ "The Inquisitor," page 461. Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935.

¹⁰ "What Is the Mind?" pages 102, 103. The Macmillan Company, 1929. Used by permission.

5. **Perfecting the Technique.** The Christian fellowship is very old but there is much yet to learn of the best use of the group in making God known. We should welcome all the wisdom that can be brought through the experience of groups, and we should be willing to make our own contribution.

a. *The Size.* How large should the group be to be most effective? We seem to find no agreement here. My own judgment is that we are inclined to make our groups too large. We Americans do so worship numbers! It is extreme, yet there is something in the observation of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, "If one talks to more than four people, it is an audience: and one cannot really think or exchange thoughts with an audience."¹¹ Surely the group must be of such a size that it is not an audience.

b. *Like-Mindedness.* Again we can find no agreement as to whether the group should be composed of those of similar outlook and experience, or whether the interplay of minds and hearts of various types is not more advantageous. Certainly the group must be of like mind in desiring God.

c. *Mutual Forbearance.* There must be on the part of the group a willingness to give and to take in Christian love and thoughtfulness. The motto on the walls of an Ashram in India, quoted by Dr. E. Stanley Jones, could appropriately be put over the meeting place of every group:

"Here we enter a fellowship,
Sometimes we will agree to differ,
Always we will resolve to love,
And unite to serve."¹²

¹¹ "North to the Orient," page 189. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935.

¹² Quoted in "Christ's Alternative to Communism," page 226. The Abingdon Press, 1935.

Human contacts are very precious and very powerful. The influence of man over man is second only to the power of God over man. Whether it be in contact with others as individuals or in the fellowship of a group, we should cherish people for their own sakes. Nor dare we lose sight of the fact that our power over them is as great as their power over us. We are not "ships that pass in the night." We leave all with whom we have contacts either better or worse for the experience.

Groups, too, can be made powerful influences for good, just as many of them to-day are powerful influences for evil. There is evident a hunger for human brotherhood. We are gregarious animals. Our interest is that there shall be groups of people who will create a spiritual atmosphere wherein God can make himself known. There are some people who can attain a deep religious experience only under the stimulus of other seekers. The Church has always been a fellowship. "The beloved community," Josiah Royce called it. In this community men are wont to find God, and to understand his will for them in a way that they can nowhere else. Perhaps Dr. Horton is right in his contention that the working unit is the intimate group.

QUESTIONS

1. In your own experience what part did others play in bringing you to Christ?
2. List those whom you know who have the power to deepen the spiritual life of others, and try to analyze this power.
3. Discuss the power and influence of the home.
4. Should the family altar be restored? (If it should be, it can be.)

5. What influence in the home do children have on one another?

6. Can true friendship have any utilitarian aspects?

7. What profitable experiences have you had in group fellowship?

8. Study the Oxford Group Movement and its contribution to the technique of group fellowship.

9. Study the Friends and their technique.

10. What advantages and dangers, other than those suggested, are to be found in groups?

11. What would you say as to the composition of a group? Should it be of adults only? of both sexes? of those of similar background, education, et cetera?

12. Is the Christian Church, and your church, experimenting in group fellowship?

CHAPTER XII

PUBLIC WORSHIP

Scripture References: Psalm 100; Isa. 1:10-17; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 4:16-21; 19:41-47; 22:14-23; I Cor. 1:18-25; II Cor. 8:1-9; Heb. 10:19-25.

In the public worship of the infinite God we have available a mighty means of attaining a vital Christian experience. "The most hopeful sign on the horizon of the religious scene," writes Dean Sperry, of Harvard, "is the very general revival of interest in the whole theory and practice of worship." That interest can be made fruitful only if it leads to active and regular participation in the services of public worship.

A NECESSITY

The good of our souls demands public worship. Like the American man of letters, we all have a tender plan of reverence which needs to be watered once each week—at least once each week. We disregard this need at great peril. Too many of us are like those to whom the author of Hebrews wrote, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is," Heb. 10:24, 25.

Though there must have been much in the synagogue worship of which he disapproved, yet Jesus frequented the places of worship: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read," Luke 4:16. Quite evidently he found there, in the worshipping

group, that which he needed. The power exerted on him as a boy by the synagogue service remained with him as a man.

Many who are now grown to man's estate can testify that in the formative years of their life the most powerful force for religion exerted by the Church was in the formal services of worship. I happen to be one of that number. The services may have been devoid of æsthetic beauty; the churches may have been barnlike; yet in the gathering of old and young for public worship was that which left its impress for life. The richer the intellectual content of a service, the better the service; but not all—perhaps not the greatest—of its contribution to life, for adults and children alike, is made through the mind. Though we could not follow the sermons, the worshipping group enriched our lives.

It is at great peril that we fail to nourish our souls by public worship. "Most college students and others who lose (or think they lose) their faith in God, really lose a sense of God's presence through neglect of worship. God is crowded out through indifference far more often than pushed out through intellectual rejection. In fact, the former is often a stepping-stone to the latter, for when God has been shut out from life, a long step has been taken toward the conclusion that God is nonexistent."¹ The description of the preacher given by Dr. Bowie in his Yale Lectures would be a good one for the Christian: "He is an individual fortified by a great fellowship and overshadowed by God." To gain this fellowship and this overshadowing of God we must engage in public worship.

A MEANS

Public worship is a means, and must always be considered as such. Its purpose is to draw the worshiper into fellow-

¹ "Conflicts in Religious Thought," by Georgia Harkness, page 247. Henry Holt and Company, 1929.

ship with the Eternal. When we fail to lift up our hearts with our hands, when we come to look upon worship as a rite or ceremony possessing virtue in and of itself, then public worship becomes not only a loss but a positive detriment to spiritual life. Alas, that worship so frequently becomes just this! The age-old controversy between the prophet and the priest centered around this very tendency. Isaiah speaks forth in no uncertain tones: "What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? saith Jehovah: I have had enough of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies,—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting," Isa. 1:11-13. Worship as a means is a power in the lives of men and acceptable to God; worship as an end becomes harmful to man and an abomination to God.

A CO-OPERATIVE ENTERPRISE

The public worship of almighty God is a coöperative enterprise. It is not something done for the worshiper by some one else; rather it is something which leaders and worshipers do together.

For the most part we call the rooms in which we meet to worship "auditoriums." An auditorium is a place where people hear. If by the use of this term we mean that here we hear the voice of God, well and good. But that is not what we mean. We mean a place where we hear a sermon by the minister and music by the choir. This commonly used word exhibits the prevalent misconception of worship. It would seem better to call our meeting places "sanctuaries."

They should be sacred places, places where all coöperate to find God, to realize both his presence and his love. That service of worship where the worshipers see no man "save Jesus only," comes close to the ideal.

ELEMENTS IN WORSHIP

It should prove helpful to sketch some of the elements in a service of worship, indicating how we can the better employ these elements in attaining fellowship with God in Christ. With the exception of the first two, these may not be given in the order of their importance.

1. **Prayer.** Jesus said, "My house shall be a house of prayer," Luke 19:46. You will recall that these words were used at the time when he cleansed the Temple. The church to-day must be a house of prayer. When you think of the church—your church—do you instinctively think of it as a house of prayer? In our churches we do nothing else so important as to pray together.

Rightly do we speak of the one who voices our petitions for us as the one who "leads" in prayer. That is all he can do. He cannot pray for us; he cannot drive us; he can only lead us: and he can lead us only if we follow. To lead others in prayer requires real artistry, but it requires much more than that. At the convocation celebrating the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Longfellow, President Eliot, of Harvard, characterized the man of poetic genius as, with one exception, the greatest single benefactor of mankind. That exception was the man who had "the power to lift other men to God in public prayer. But even the man who has that ability can lead only those who want to be led.

Should not corporate silence have larger place in public worship? In this the group can many times really pray together. We so insist on something going on all the time,

even in the worship of the heavenly Father. A minister made an attempt to use silence in his service. It was plainly marked on the bulletin. After this change in form had been in use for some weeks, one of his most devout officers came to him in distress and asked if there were not some way by which they could obviate that "awkward pause" in the service. Here, as in so many other places, our brethren of the Society of Friends have much to teach the rest of us.

2. Scripture Reading. In most of our Protestant churches the pulpit has commanded the focal point. In the early days of Protestantism it was not the pulpit but the reading desk, on which was the Bible, that was accorded the central position. Rightly should large use be made of Holy Scripture in worship.

Careless and slovenly reading of the Bible in a service of public worship is unforgivable. So is careless and slovenly listening to the reading of Scripture unforgivable. The custom in the old Scottish church of having a Bible in every pew might well be revived. When the minister began to read, the worshipers took out their Bibles and followed word for word. It is as incumbent upon the worshiper devoutly to listen as it is upon the leader devoutly to read.

3. Music. Great music, in services of worship and in other places as well, has the power to stir our souls and draw us to God. "Father, we thank thee for music. Music makes us joyful and brings us nearer to thee." We should worship in music.

"Make a joyful noise unto Jehovah, all ye lands.
Serve Jehovah with gladness:
Come before his presence with singing."
Ps. 100:1, 2.

A larger place should be given to the discussion of music than is possible here. Great music not only supports and confirms our faith in the greatness of the soul, but by it we are wafted into the very presence of the Eternal. What one of us does not remember some fine experience when by the power of music he was fairly lifted out of himself? The late Dr. S. Parkes Cadman has given us the benefit of a great experience which came to him: "But is it not the veriest tyro in music who often gets a tumult of bliss out of it? Speaking as one who belongs to this immense group, I can testify that the first time I heard really good music greatly played I felt I was on the verge of an apocalypse. With thirty thousand other eager listeners I stood entranced in the park of my native county town while the massed bands of the British Guards led off with Handel's 'Largo.' For one unsophisticated lad in the audience life was never the same again and his career was decided then and there. As the spiritualities which Handel felt were transmitted to the boy's enraptured ears he accepted their challenge. Many years have elapsed since that originating experience, but memory revives it to-day with unfading vividness."²

In the preface to his hymn book of 1707, Isaac Watts wrote: "While we sing the praises of God in his church we are employed in that part of worship which of all others is nearest akin to Heaven, and 'tis a pity that this of all others should be performed the worst on earth. To see the dull indifference, the negligent and the thoughtless air that sits upon the faces of the whole assembly while the Psalm is on their lips might tempt even a charitable observer to suspect the fervency of inward religion, and 'tis much to be feared that the minds of most of the worshipers are absent or un-

² "Adventure for Happiness," page 211. The Macmillan Company, 1935. Used by permission.

concerned. But of all religious solemnities Psalmody is the most unhappily managed. That very action which should elevate us to the most delightful and divine sensations doth not only flat our Devotions but too often awakens our regret and touches all the springs of uneasiness within us." ³ Music can never be the power in our lives it should be by mere listening to it, but only by participating in it.

4. Offering. The offering seems to many of us as a most unfortunate interruption in a service of worship. Many times it is just that, but it can be, and should be, an act of true worship. With apparently no feeling of incongruity, Paul turned from his great hymn on immortality to the collection that was to be taken, I Cor. 16:1. Again, he wrote to the Corinthians, "But as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all earnestness, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also," II Cor. 8:7. And the grace to which he referred was the grace of giving. It is recorded that Jesus "sat down over against the treasury, and beheld how the multitude cast money into the treasury," Mark 12:41.

5. Sermon. Preaching has an important place in the Christian religion. "For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe." I Cor. 1:21. At the same time it is quite too bad that the sermon has assumed the place it has in Protestant services. To many people all else is preliminary and an anticlimax. "The sermon is the thing."

The writers of the Westminster Standards not only placed preaching last, but they gave this warning: "As one primary design of public ordinances is to pay social acts of homage

³ Quoted in "Facing Our Day," by William Chalmers Covert, pages 158, 159. The Abingdon Press, 1934. Used by permission.

to the most high God, ministers ought to be careful not to make their sermons so long as to interfere with or exclude the more important duties of prayer and praise; but preserve a just proportion between the several parts of public worship." ⁴

It takes not only a great preacher to preach a powerful sermon; it takes the pew as well. A pastor replied to one who pointed out that "in those days" they had great preachers that "in those days" they had great listeners as well. "The fact of the matter is, of course, that the atmosphere of faith and prayer does make good preaching inevitable, whereas the attitude of suspicion and criticism will 'freeze the genial currents of the soul,' and give to any earnest and spiritual minister a sense of laboring at the oar to no purpose." ⁵ Preaching, like all the parts of public worship, is a co-operative enterprise.

THE SACRAMENTS

The sacraments of the Church, especially the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, are means to a vital Christian experience. We should be making a wiser and wider use of the Communion service than we are now making. All theories aside, in this rite men have found God. They have been made aware of his presence, and of human fellowship as well, as they have gathered around the Lord's table and kept this feast commemorating his death for us. "And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave to them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. And the cup in like manner after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even

⁴ "Directory for the Worship of God," Chapter VII, Section IV.

⁵ "The Romance of Preaching," by Charles Sylvester Horne, page 210. Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914.

that which is poured out for you." Luke 22:19, 20. Here, as one of the old mystics put it, is "the medicine of immortality."

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

In few places does that which we term "atmosphere" play so important a part as in that of worship. We cannot rush breathlessly and thoughtlessly into the sanctuary and there expect to realize the presence of God.

For all of us, whether we follow their statement of faith in its entirety or not, there is wise counsel in the words of the Westminster fathers: "I. When the time appointed for public worship is come, let the people enter the church, and take their seats in a decent, grave, and reverent manner.

"II. In time of public worship, let all the people attend with gravity and reverence; forbearing to read any thing, except what the minister is then reading or citing; abstaining from all whisperings; from salutations of persons present, or coming in; and from gazing about, sleeping, smiling, and all other indecent behavior." ⁶

The days of the "Cotter's Saturday Night" will doubtless never be again, but there is much to be said for the old custom of beginning to prepare for the Sabbath at sundown the night before. Surely the stated worship of almighty God is too important a matter to come to it tired in body and depleted in spirit, after the distracting hours of Saturday night, a late awakening, a hurried breakfast, and the perusal of the morning paper! The minister who on Sunday morning faces people prepared in body, mind, and spirit for the most sacred and holy experience of the week finds himself in a position to lead them in the act of worship.

⁶ "Directory for the Worship of God," Chapter II, Sections I, II.

TRAINING IN WORSHIP

Worship, too, is an art, and as such must be learned and constantly practiced. It is incumbent upon us, no matter what our age or our experience, to train ourselves in the worship of God.

There is evident in the American Church to-day a tendency toward the enrichment and embellishment of services of worship. Many find themselves almost in rebellion against any such thing. In some plain, country chapel, in a service almost without form and void, they have had lasting experiences of God's presence and power. No one would deny that God is present in the plainest of services. However, it was not the plainness and lack of formality that made people conscious of God. They found him in spite of these things. Many find it much easier to realize God's presence in places and services that are æsthetically satisfying. We do not do well to resent any change in the good old ways. We do better to set ourselves to training in the art of worship.

God and man alike prefer that things shall be done "decently and in order." Beauty is more than "the handmaid of truth." If a stately service of reverent beauty makes no appeal to our spirits we may well take thought lest the trouble is with us rather than with the service.

Beautiful churches and elaborate services of worship can never take the place of the devotion of the heart. Dr. E. Stanley Jones said a few years ago: "On my trip to America I was struck by the growing grandeur of the houses of worship and the increasing ornateness of ritual and liturgy. The feeling seemed to be that the millennium lay just on the other side of an elaborate new church building, a vested choir, and stately possessions. If life lay along this line, then Roman Catholicism would have it, for it makes Protestantism seem amateurish in this realm. Europe is filled with stately

cathedrals and stale Christianity, with religious processions and with religious paralysis." ⁷ There is a danger in the attempt to enrich our services of worship, just as there is in all good things. We should employ the good while guarding against the evil.

The Church of Christ renders no more important service to men than to bring them together for worship. "The church which receives into its doors on Sunday morning a congregation of men and women, young men and maidens, hardened, coarsened, disheartened, paganized by a week of rough contact with the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and by its appointed services sends them back to their homes and to their toil renewed and enriched, ennobled and sweetened, ready to take up their tasks with fresh zest and relish and do them better, carrying on serenely—that church has done something intensely practical." ⁸ The church can only provide the setting and the leadership. The participation remains with each one of us personally.

Not as an end in itself, but as a means of helping us on our way toward a vital Christian experience, public worship takes high place.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you account for the revival of interest in worship? Is this revival a good thing?
2. In your judgment can a man maintain his spiritual life without the benefit of public worship?
3. Review the record in the Old Testament of the conflict between the prophets and the priests.
4. Rank the elements in worship in the order of their relative importance.

⁷ "The Christ of Every Road," page 36. The Abingdon Press, 1930.

⁸ "The Honor of the Church," by Charles R. Brown, page 69. Pilgrim Press, 1922.

5. From what part of public worship do you personally get the greatest good?

6. Should we employ silence in our services? How can we best do it?

7. Do choirs help in real worship? How can choirs be made to lead us and not to sing for us? Is the fault with the choirs or with the congregations?

8. Is the congregational singing in your church what it should be? How can it be improved?

9. Are you doing your part to make the reading of the Scripture and the sermon effective?

10. How can we make the sacraments more helpful?

11. In what definite ways can we prepare ourselves for public worship?

12. How can we train ourselves in the art of worship?

CHAPTER XIII

WORKING WITH GOD

Scripture References: I Kings 19:9-18; Micah 6:6-8; Matt. 5:17-20; 25:14-30; Luke 4:16-24; John 7:14-24; 13:20-30; I Cor. 10:23-32.

Jesus gave utterance to one of the most profound truths in the spiritual life when he said, "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching," John 7:17. It is not only that the vital Christian experience must issue in consecration to the will of God; in the very doing of his will we shall find him. "God makes his presence known with irresistible conviction in the act of the will by which man surrenders without reserve to the highest he knows."¹ Christian experience must never be considered as something apart from life. It is part and parcel of the normal, healthy, full life the Master came to bring, John 10:10. As we enter into this life, throwing ourselves with all the powers given us of God into his work in the world, we shall find him at our sides and in our hearts.

"We've sought and found Thee in the secret place
And marveled at the radiance of Thy face;
But often in some far-off Galilee
Beheld Thee fairer yet while serving Thee."

Dr. Calvin W. Laufer has well expressed the simple and sublime truth in his hymn. We can best find God while serving him.

¹ "God at Work," by William Adams Brown, page 118. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.

GOD'S WORK

Almost at once there comes the question as to what is God's work. In a vague and general way we may believe that God's work must be done in the world, but we have no clear conception of just what God's work is or what our part in it is. From our hearts there comes the cry, "Lord, what wilt thou have *me* to do?"

After condemning the priestly practices, which in his day had become a detriment and an abomination, the old Testament prophet Micah gave this fine summary: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Micah 6:8. Our Lord summed up the requirements of the law in love to God and love to men. Mark 12:29-31. When our lives are out-reached in love for God and for men we are doing God's work.

All cannot do the same work. To some ten talents are given and to others one. God does not expect of a one-talent man the same work that he expects from a ten-talent man. While we should ever aspire to do finer and better things for God, yet we stand approved or condemned by the ways in which we use what is given to us. Some of the most fearsome words Christ employed were in his condemnation of the one-talent man. And what had he done? Nothing; he had just done nothing; and so he was cast into outer darkness. Matt. 25:14-30. I may not be able to do much but what I can do, by the grace of God, I must do. I cannot expect to find God's work for me, and so to find him, unless I am using to his glory all of the powers of body and mind which are mine.

There is no yardstick by which we can measure a life. Who is great and who is small, we do not know. To suc-

cumb to the temper of the age and to measure everything by size is to miss the point.

If it seems to us a small thing that the prophet said, it is because we have not caught the significance of his statement. Micah's words have been called the most important in prophetic literature. Few words in all literature are fraught with deeper meaning.

1. "Do Justly." Justice is not a simple matter, nor is it easy to do justly. What must I do to be just? This should be our constant study. The greatest injustices to-day, as the greatest sins, are committed by us as groups and not as individuals. We may be just in our personal relations and yet fail miserably as members of society.

2. "Love Kindness." Justice is not enough. In the Kingdom of God kindness, or mercy, must prevail. Not one of us could stand if cold, stark justice were meted out to us. Who is not amazed at the hardness of his own heart? He who manifests in his own life Christian charity is about the Father's business.

3. "Walk Humbly with . . . God." We cannot "do justly" or "love kindness" unless we "walk humbly with . . . God." You will note that in all three of the requirements the statement is positive. One of the finest bits of description given us of Jesus is that he "went about doing good," Acts 10:38. As he went he was doing the Father's work. The nature of the task is not of great importance. The spirit in which the work is performed is the thing that matters.

"THEY ALSO SERVE"

If one must find God in the work which the world calls great, then numberless people are shut out. Many there are who are unable to work; many others who are able cannot

to-day find work. We must not confuse the work of God and the work of the world. When darkness descended upon him and his dearest dreams seemed shattered, when he thought that by his blindness he was to be forever precluded from active life, John Milton wrote his immortal sonnet on his own blindness, ending, "They also serve who only stand and wait." God's work is being done to-day by many who feel that they are doing nothing, who can "only stand and wait."

The power of being is above that of doing, far above that of saying. Among my friends is a man who through many years has served his community as a teacher. Generation after generation of students have passed through his classroom, and all who have worked with him have been made better. This man is a most willing worker in his church. He is one of the few men of whom it might be said that he is too conscientious. A few years ago for long months this teacher battled his way back to life and health. I am sure that he looks upon that year as lost. Yet I venture to say that he did more for his students, for his friends, and for his church by the fine spirit of Christian fortitude and grace he manifested during that trying time than in any other year.

No matter what our opportunities are, or what our condition may be, we can work with God, and through our work know him more fully and understand him the better.

LIFE AS A SACRAMENT

All of life is sacred. God is present in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; he is also present in the sacrament of life. This was the view Paul had when he wrote to the Corinthians, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," I Cor. 10:31. "The particular sacraments," writes Dean Inge, "are meant to teach us that all life is sacramental. Every deliberate act

should be, in a sense, the outward sign of inward grace. A sacrament is more than a symbol. A symbol leads us from the lower to the higher; a sacrament brings us back again to earth, but infuses a heavenly meaning and divine potency into common things and actions."² When we do take the Christian view and consider life itself as a divine thing, we shall find God in the midst of us.

Brother Lawrence learned how to practice the presence of God. Without training or opportunities he became an incomparable influence among high and low. His one aim in life was to bring about a conscious personal union between himself and God. Truly his was a vital Christian experience. Yet a kitchen and an altar were the same to him, and to pick up a straw was as grand a service as to preach to multitudes. In his own words: "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possessed God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament." Brother Lawrence also said that the most excellent method he had found of going to God was that of doing our common business without any view of pleasing men, and (as far as we are capable) purely for the love of God. Tasks done in such a way may be common, but they are never commonplace.

When life becomes a sacrament the most menial task takes on deep significance. "This is a fine occupation for a count," said Duke Geoffrey, of Lorraine, to his brother Frederick, whom he found washing dishes in a monastery. "You are right, Duke," was the reply; "I ought to think myself honored by the humblest service to the Master."

² "Personal Religion and the Life of Devotion," pages 47, 48. Longmans, Green & Co., 1924.

LEARNING BY LIVING

As we work with other people, we get to know them better. When men are united in a common purpose and task, they find themselves drawn into deep and understanding fellowship. As we throw ourselves without reserve into the work of the heavenly Father, we feel ourselves drawn into his presence. As Whiting Williams once put it, "We live our way into our thinking rather than think our way into our living." Of course, as a matter of fact, we do both.

You will recall the old story of Elijah, who after he had done many mighty deeds for Jehovah was frightened by the wicked queen and ran away into the wilderness. There he heard the "still small voice," and the question, "What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away," I Kings 19:9, 10. If one of us had found a man in that pitiable plight we would have argued with him and tried to set him right, assuring him that God was not dead and that all men had not deserted. The Lord did none of these things: "And Jehovah said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, thou shalt anoint Hazael to be king over Syria," v. 15. The prophet was set to work. As he went about the task pointed out for him, his faith was restored and he was again courageous.

"Religion is an experience of kinship with the deepest Reality in the universe and hence of membership in an infinitely meaningful world and of sharing in an ever unfolding life."³ For the Christian that "deepest Reality" is the God

³ "The Meaning and Truth of Religion," by Eugene William Lyman, page 74. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.

and Father revealed in Jesus Christ. The world is for us infinitely meaningful because here God's eternal purposes of love are being worked out. Our own lives gain significance and meaning as we sink ourselves in God's purposes.

The disciples were nonplused and could not understand Jesus when he said: "I have meat to eat that ye know not. . . . My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work," John 4:32, 34. In the doing of the Father's will Jesus found refreshment and strength. In the doing of that will strength is given which is above our own. This doing of God's will is a very practical thing. In the synagogue Jesus applied to himself the words of the Old Testament prophet:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

We shall learn the joy of God's presence only by working with him to make this a better world. In the parable of the Talents those who received the Lord's approbation were given a peculiar reward. They were given more work to do, greater tasks to perform. "His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Matt. 25:23. There is no greater blessedness that can come to us than to have tasks to do for God. Therein shall we find joy, and therein shall we find him.

THE FATHER'S WORLD

This is the Father's world and we, his children, are to work with him to make the world what it ought to be, and what, in God's good time, it will be, when his will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We are not strangers here. As a lad I attended a great meeting of men in Indianapolis. As those men sang a gospel song which had then but recently been published they fairly raised the roof. As they sang those words:

"I am a stranger here, within a foreign land;
My home is far away, upon a golden strand,"

I felt that there was something wrong in the sentiment. I know now that there *was* something wrong. We have no business to be strangers here, nor have we any business to pray for the wings of a dove. Our business is not to fly away and build a nest and remain forever at rest. Our business is to do our part by the grace of God toward transforming this world into the Kingdom of God.

"This is my Father's world,
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
The battle is not done;
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and heaven be one."⁴

"THY KINGDOM COME"

Personal spiritual renewal is to be found only in consecration to the great purposes of Christ. We must never allow

⁴ Maltbie D. Babcock. Used by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

this vision of the Kingdom of God to be pushed into the background of our thinking or living. We cannot properly cultivate the religious life apart from this. All that about which we have been thinking is to no end unless we are losing ourselves in doing the Father's will. "To find where in our world God wants some definite thing done and to lose ourselves in striving to accomplish it would be a sure means to spiritual renewal. For spiritual renewal comes through an accession of divine life and power, and divine power is free and unfailing if in our living and working for God we have cast ourselves upon it; but it is not wasted on us if nothing we are attempting makes it necessary to us. . . . If church people would give themselves wholly and would work by all right means to establish God's righteousness in the world, they would not have long to wait for religious renewal." ⁵

We can never know God by talking about him. Jesus said it matters not whether we say, "Lord, Lord." "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." Matt. 7:21. What does matter is to give ourselves to him. And we can give ourselves to him only as we give ourselves to his sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters.

The Kingdom will come and God's will shall be done "in earth, as it is in heaven." But it must come through human agencies. God works through men and women. He cannot make Antonio's violins without Antonio. He would work in and through you and me.

"That is not done by sword or tongue or pen:
There is but one way: God make us better men."

⁵ "Conditions of Religious Renewal," by John Line. The Christian Century, June 3, 1936. Used by permission.

TESTING OUR EXPERIENCE

Our experience must be constantly tested. It is being constantly tested by others. It must issue in Christlike lives or it is spurious. We may easily delude ourselves and get inner satisfaction and peace, and yet never enter into the divine fellowship. "No virtue is to be trusted," said John Tauler, "until it has been put into practice." We might say the same for experience. It is not to be trusted until it issues in deeper, more consecrated lives. "The ultimate evidence for Christianity is not its reasonableness but the type of personality that it produces in its disciples." ⁶ Ultimately all religious practices must stand or fall by their ability to produce character.

With God right actions, which, of course, can spring only from right attitudes, count most. "If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them." John 13:17. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves." James 1:22. "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5:20.

Religion is not a side issue in life. Religion is life—the finest, fullest, freest life. In the words of Robert Browning:

"Religion's all or nothing; it's no mere smile
Of contentment, sigh of aspiration, sir—
No quality of the finelier tempered clay
Like its whiteness or its lightness, rather stuff
Of the very stuff; life of life, and self of self."

Religion can never be reduced to religious practices, but religious practices can be most powerful in maintaining true religion.

⁶ "A Wanderer's Way," by Charles E. Raven, page 76. Henry Holt and Company, 1929.

True greatness does not lie within us. It does lie in our willingness to lay hold of the divine strength.

When General Booth lay dying, his friends gathered around him. One of them said, "Tell us, General, before you go, what has been the secret of your wonderful life." The old man thought for a moment and then said slowly, "If there is any secret it has been this, that Christ has had everything there is of me."

This is an open secret and this way is open to all of us. In this way we shall not only find peace and joy for ourselves, but, what is more important, we shall find God and shall enter into fellowship with him. This fellowship is the vital Christian experience.

QUESTIONS

1. Where has God been the most real to you, in religious exercises or in working with him?
2. Discuss further the lessons in the parable of the Talents.
3. Wherein do we fail the most miserably—in doing justice, in loving kindness, or in walking humbly with God?
4. Give illustrations, from personal knowledge or from your reading, of men and women who served their day, though they were barred from participation in what we call the work of the world.
5. Discuss further the implication of the view that life's a sacrament.
6. In your judgment do we think our way into our living or live our way into our thinking?
7. What must be our spirit if it is our "meat" to do God's will?
8. In what ways is the Christian a citizen of two worlds? How rightly can we reconcile the two views? In your judg-

ment is there a danger that we shall be too much at home in this world?

9. What are the evidences that this is the Father's world? Do we mean that the present society is ordained of God? How far, as Christians, should we be rebels against the present order of society?

10. Is a religious revival conditioned upon a better understanding of the ideal which Jesus placed so central, the Kingdom of God?

11. Rank the ways to a vital religious experience which have been discussed—Scripture, devotional literature, prayer, mysticism, personal contacts and group fellowship, public worship, and working with God—in the order of their importance. What other ways can you suggest?

12. Would you accept the statement that the value of religious experience must be measured by the ethical dividends it pays?

